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The inner life of Christ:

V. I.

"THESE SAYINGS OF MINE:"

PULPIT NOTES ON SEVEN CHAPTERS

OF

THE FIRST GOSPEL,

AND OTHER SERMONS.

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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INTRODUCTION.

THE publishers of this volume desire a few introductory paragraphs from one who knows the famous London preacher.

Joseph Parker was born in 1830 in Northumberland, England, a county which has produced such a lawyer as Lord Eldon, such an engineer as George Stephenson, and such a preacher as Thomas Binney. He regards his training for the ministry to have commenced when he was seven years of age. It is told that when he was not more than five he was seen alone, and heard saying, as he looked at the dazzling sun,

“What are these arrayed in white,
Brighter than the noonday sun.”

After a thorough training in the ancient languages and mathematics, he studied logic and natural and moral philosophy in University College, London. After that he was for a short time pulpit assistant to Dr. John Campbell, of the Whitfield Tabernacle. Then he was settled five years in Banbury, where he built a new chapel, after which he succeeded the learned Dr. Robert Halley in Manchester, where he labored with increasing success and distinction until he was called to the Church in the Poultry, London, 1869. More and more, as preacher and author, he became known to the public. By instituting a Thursday morning course of sermons he increased the numbers of those whom he reached with the Gospel, as many whose engagements elsewhere precluded them from hearing Dr. Parker on Sunday could attend these services. He projected and built the City Temple, a noble structure at one end of Holborn Viaduct, far from the fashionable quarter of London and removed from even the plainer portion of dwellings, but in the heart of what is technically called “The City.” This great church cost \$250,000, and such men as Dean Stanley and England’s great Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone, have spoken in it.

The first knowledge we had of him in America was, I think, the publication of his work styled “*Ecce Deus*.” “*Ecce Homo*” had appeared anonymously and been known and read by all religious American scholars, and had produced a very great impression. “*Ecce Deus*” would naturally

attract attention as probably occasioned by "Ecce Homo." So in point of fact it was. But, while meeting many points of "Ecce Homo" polemically, it had its own aim and scope. It exhibited a freshness and a power which would have secured its place, on the ground of its other higher merits, even if it had not had the additional virtue of antagonizing certain errors of "Ecce Homo." Whoso read it felt that its author must be a man of much more than ordinary ability. When it was announced that Dr. Parker was the author thousands on this side of the Atlantic became interested in him. It prepared the warm reception which he met when he came to the Evangelical Alliance in 1873. It is well remembered that no representative from Great Britain produced such a marked impression as Dr. Parker did by the magnificent address which he delivered in the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. Ever since that very many Americans have had a great interest in this London preacher. His book, "The Paraclete," maintained his reputation and enlarged the circles of his readers. His sermons have been republished frequently in religious newspapers of different denominations in different parts of the United States, and perhaps the Doctor never speaks from his pulpit without having Americans in his audience.

But nothing that he has published so shows the man, I think, as the following sermons. I heard three of them. The Doctor's plan is to preach his sermons from notes, not very copious, and the discourse of Sunday morning is taken down verbatim by an American phonographer. They are very little "touched up" for the press, and are printed in "The Fountain" so as to be ready for the public on the Thursday morning when they are re-delivered. This Thursday morning service is a peculiarity. It is duly advertised. Indeed, a large placard stands in front of the City Temple, making announcements of church work and publications. As the Doctor's stated parishoners have heard these sermons, they leave the edifice for the worshippers on Thursday morning. Ordinarily the lower floor is well filled, and it is a congregation of mark. People who have heard of the Doctor or of the City Temple or have read his works come from different parts of London and of the world to hear him preach. In the vestibule the sermon which is about to be delivered can be bought for a penny. You may undertake the experiment of following the delivered discourse from the printed page, but it will be a failure. The preacher looks his congregation in the face, and goes at preaching as one goes at threshing. He keeps on the track of the printed discourse until he has got on a head of steam, and then in turning an angle in the road he is very liable to jump off and plough the fields until he reaches the track again. Like all strong preachers he is most difficult to report. The finest passage I heard in the three discourses to which I listened was not in the printed report in "The Fountain," nor does it appear in the sermon in this volume. The preacher had climbed to the top of the ladder of one portion of his sermon, and had ascended

so rapidly and ardently as to have acquired a rush which made him spread his wings and take a flight beyond. That flight carried his whole congregation with him, and they were more breathless than he. The advantage of extemporaneous preaching is that it accomplishes that for which preaching was intended, but it can never be reproduced. The preacher must make his choice. *Usually* what is richest in preaching is poorest in print. Whitfield's sermons as printed are almost absolutely worthless. The "report" shows the track on which the sermon ran; but we know that the most intelligent man, who had never seen a railroad, could never from gazing at a track produce mentally the bounding locomotive and the richly freighted train as they thundered along the railway. These republished discourses, which show very accurately the track of the preacher's mind, will be very useful as studies to those who have not listened to Dr. Parker; while those who have heard him, of whom there are multitudes in America, will have fresh pleasure in filling up the outline by recollections of the large, hearty, impressive preacher.

It is proper to let Dr. Parker speak for himself, that the reader may know what the preacher's idea of this volume really is. In accounting for the abrupt and urgent style often perceptible in these discourses, and which will be their chief charm to many, the Doctor says :

"There is no attempt at literary composition. My aim was to *preach*; to formulate sentences that would go immediately home to the intelligence and feeling of my hearers, and to prevent all wandering of interest and expectancy. Now that I see my own hurried words in print, I see where I could mend many of the sentences as to their merely literary structure; on the other hand I see a force in many of them which could not have been imparted in the coldness of the study. I care less and less for *literary* sermons. What Mr. Gladstone is in parliament; what Henry Brougham was at the bar; and what Bishop Wilberforce was on the platform; that, as to *extemporaneousness*, preachers should aim to be in the pulpit. It is not to be supposed that extemporaneous preaching is extemporaneous *thinking*. With the *thoughts* of these discourses I have been familiar for a life-time; the *words* alone are the choice of the moment. Let young preachers mark this distinction carefully, lest they imagine they have only to ascend a pulpit and give out a text in order to preach and enforce the sacred gospel. To young preachers I have often said, Give your days to study and your nights to prayer, if you would solidly and permanently excel in the holy ministry. That solemn advice I reiterate with all the mellow emphasis of ever-enlarging personal experience of pulpit life and service. At the same time, *preach* the gospel! Do not *read* it, or if you must read to some extent, reserve the power to speak directly and fervently to the heart of the hearer, with all the urgency and passion of the most earnest yearning for his instruction and salvation. Strange as it may

appear to those who have had no experience in the matter, it is easier to *read* than to *preach* a sermon, assuming that both the reading and the preaching are really to be of the best quality. Less thought is required in a written than in a spoken address, because so much more use can be made of language ; it can be arranged in so many different ways ; it can be made to take on all sides and varieties of rhetorical color ; the writer has time for all this in the seclusion and quiet of his study. It is not so with the speaker ; he must seize the thought instantly and hasten forward without lingering in literary wistfulness over the form and line of his eager sentences. Preachers should remember that there is extemporaneous *hearing* as well as extemporaneous preaching. Hearers are unprepared ; probably their last sentence before entering church was rather secular than religious ; their minds have to be brought from afar to the immediate business of the transient occasion ; they are in no mood to appreciate merely literary beauties ; they must be called almost with sharpness and military decision to the work which is to be done, and this call will be most effectively delivered by the man who is least trammelled with the mere formalities of his sacred office."

Last summer Dr. Parker and his charming wife made a hurried visit to New York. He came merely for the rest which the sea-trip gives. We had several delightful interviews with him, renewing the pleasant intercourse which we had in his beautiful home at North Holme, Highbury Park, in the north of London. A writer in the "Homiletic Monthly" availed himself of an opportunity to get his views on various points. We have space for two :—

"Do you pay attention to physical training?"

"My residence at North Holme, Highbury Park, is three miles from City Temple. Every Sunday morning I walk to church and take a bath there, coming, therefore, to my work fresh and resilient.

"A walk home gives me six miles for the day's exercise. My studies are not usually extended into the night. This trip is taken mainly for the invigoration to be gained by the ocean passage."

"How do you prepare sermons?"

"I have no uniform plan of preparation for the pulpit. I have tried all plans except the *memoriter*, and that I have never been able to adopt. I cannot commit anything to memory with the certainty of recalling it when needed ; indeed, I may say that for words I have no memory at all. Some of my most friendly critics have suggested that I should have been an actor, not knowing, I presume, that Shakespeare would have been verbally slain by my treacherous slips, and that Hamlet or Othello would have been a new character every night and an eternal surprise to the actor himself. I leave the words to suggest themselves at the moment of delivery, though sometimes, especially when the subject requires critical handling, I have carefully shaped and adjusted every sentence.

“Of all kinds of preaching, I love the expository most. You will understand this from the fact that I have, during the last seven years, expounded most of the first two books of the Pentateuch, the whole book of Nehemiah, the whole of Ecclesiastes, and nearly half the Gospel of Matthew. I care less and less for mere catch-texts and for small ingenuities in pulpit mechanics. Our cleverness is our destruction as expositors. In its exercise we lose breadth, substance, and dignity, and become mere tricksters and jugglers. I care very little for merely literary polish in preaching. We want INTELLIGENCE, UNCTION and DIRECTNESS. All the rest is comparatively worthless. The preacher is not an author, reading his own manuscript ; he is a Voice, a Fire, a Herald, bold and eager in his sacred work—an orator speaking in Heaven’s name and strength. There are more authors in the pulpit than preachers. Here is the weakness of the pulpit. It has become a competitor of the press, and has abandoned its special and incommunicable function.”

It will give me pleasure to know that any word of mine can make an increase in the number of Dr. Parker’s readers and friends. I thank the publishers for giving me an opportunity of saying a kind word in behalf of a preacher of whom I have occasionally heard unkind words, but from whose lips I never heard an uncharitable speech of mortal man.

CHARLES F. DEEMS.

CHURCH OF THE STRANGERS,
New York, Dec., 1880.

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THESE SAYINGS OF MINE.

By JOSEPH PARKER, D. D.

VOLUME I.

THESE SAYINGS OF MINE.

I.

EVERY NAME HISTORICAL — CHRIST ALWAYS COMING — CHRIST COMES
THROUGH ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE.

MATTHEW i. 1-17.

1. The book of the generation (a Hebrew form) of Jesus Christ (Jesus was a common name, but not *Christ*), the Son of David (the most popular of his names), the son of Abraham.

2. Abraham begat Isaac ; and Isaac begat Jacob ; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren ;

3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar (quite exceptional to find the name of a woman in a Jewish genealogy) ; and Phares begat Esrom ; and Esrom begat Aram .

4. And Aram begat Aminadab ; and Aminadab begat Naasson (the brother-in-law of Aaron) ; and Naasson begat Salmon (probably one of the two spies saved by Rahab) ;

5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab (the harlot of Jericho) ; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth (a heathen Moabitess) ; and Obed begat Jesse ;

6. And Jesse begat David the king ; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias (the last woman's name in the genealogy) ;

7. And Solomon begat Roboam ; and Roboam begat Abia ; and Abia begat Asa ;

8. And Asa begat Josaphat ; and Josaphat begat Joram ; and Joram begat Ozias (the Uzziah of the Old Testament) ;

9. And Ozias begat Joatham ; and Joatham begat Achaz ; and Achaz begat Ezekias ;

10. And Ezekias begat Manasses ; and Manasses begat Amon ; and Amon begat Josias ;

11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon :

12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel ; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel ;

13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud ; and Abiud begat Eliakim ; and Eliakim begat Azor ;

14. And Azor begat Sadoc ; and Sadoc begat Achim ; and Achim begat Eliud ;

15. And Eliud begat Eleazar ; and Eleazar begat Matthan ; and Matthan begat Jacob ;

16. And Jacob begat Joseph (descended from David through Rehoboam and Solomon) the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations ; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations ; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. (So divided merely to help the memory. The division is arbitrary.)

THIS is a genealogical tree. One sometimes wonders why such lists of names are in a book which is specifically known as a revelation of the will

and love of God. Who cares to read a genealogical table? Most of the names are unknown, many of them are difficult to pronounce, and once read, who can remember a solitary verse of the whole catalogue? Yet the names are here, and if here, there must be some purpose in the record. God is a severe economist of space as of everything else: he does not throw anything away, though there may be wastefulness here and there, according to our present incomplete notions of things. Fasten your attention upon this genealogical tree for the purpose of studying it with a view of finding out whether the matter ends within this formal tree, or whether it does not become a tree that fills the whole earth and heaven, yea, and spreads itself over all the spaces and liberties of the universe.

The great mistake which you have to overcome in your Christian studies is, that Jesus Christ lived within a few days only, and then ceased to live upon the earth. In only a very narrow sense is that true. I am interested for the time being in learning the peculiar circumstances under which my Lord's ministry was conducted. I am not unwilling to listen to pictorial descriptions of the scenery through which he passed: it gives me but momentary delight to know whether he spoke in the sunrise or in the sunset, yet I like to hear the rhetoricians' beautiful way of setting forth the surrounding circumstances of his ministry. But Jesus Christ was *not a figure on a landscape*: he was and is the life of all living things. Paint the landscape when you are going to give some hint of mighty discoverers or warriors or men of local and perishable renown; the landscape may be more important than such men themselves were within the immediate lines of their earthly history; but in the case of Jesus Christ I want nothing but Christ: I want the landscape to fade away into an invisible fleck, and nothing to be seen but the CHRIST, filling all things and making all things look small under his infinite presence.

We speak of Jesus Christ as a historical character. In no such sense can I be constrained to speak of him except for momentary convenience. Jesus Christ is the contemporary of all ages. He is living as certainly upon the earth as he ever lived in Nazareth. He is the Man of to-day, and there is no man beside. All good things flow from him, all beauty takes the hue of its tenderest colour from his countenance, and all strength is but a flash and throb of his almightiness. It is in this way that I study Christ, and it is so that we come to live upon most intimate terms, so that every day he baptizes me with his blood, and I besprinkle him with my tears. Do not go to the grave to find Christ: you will only find an angel there who says, "He is not here, he is risen." That is the daily speech which may be made about Christ: he is risen, so as to claim a still higher place in the attention and confidence of men, so as to fill a wider place, so as to claim a higher, stronger throne—always rising. The resurrection is not a miracle, measurable within five seconds, or within the twinkling

of an eye—it is the perpetual miracle of truth and purity and divine life.

Realize the *nearness* of Christ. Do not vex your souls by thinking that he lived centuries since. The centuries have nothing to do with his life except to continue it, and to open up some new unfoldment of its infinite compass and resource. I will say to my soul—Thy Saviour is looking upon thee : he is watching all thy growth, he is sending his daily blessings upon thee, he is alway dying, alway rising, alway interceding—a contradiction it may be in literal words, but the soul that has passed through the mystery of that agony which is birth, will understand that amid all this contradiction of letters there is a solid and melodious reconciliation and unity of meaning.

Every name is more or less historical. Even *your* obscure name has around it a little circle of associations peculiarly and incommunicably its own. What we call obscurity is only a relative term. God knows all the insects that are in the air : all the ephemera that are born in the sunbeam and that die in the moment of their birth, he registers in his great record. Do not say it does not matter what you, so little, obscure, unknown and socially contemptible, do. Every atom has its own shadow, every life has its own charge, and because you are obscure and unimportant now, it does not follow that you need be so in the lapse of time. Besides that, consider your son. Sometimes a great figure stands upon a common and rough pedestal : who can tell the name of the father and mother of Moses? Yet Moses stands up in the gallery of history the most towering and indestructible figure. Do not let us therefore look at our own personal standing alone : we cannot tell what lives we may be, under God, creating, guiding, stimulating, blessing. We may bless others by sympathy, we may help the great by prayer : many an obscure suppliant gladdened the great heart of Paul by nothing but simple, loving intercession for him, that he might set his feet upon the neck of his enemies and be crowned with the glory of Christ's honour.

Some of these names were in the *direct* line of the royal succession, and some come into the genealogical table, as it were *indirectly*, so that commentators have to pause in their annotations and wonder how such and such names came into the genealogical table at all. We are soon puzzled by divine providences—things do not always fall into easy straight lines ; life is a complication, a problem, a difficulty. Now and again we catch a clue, and think we can unwind the whole, and presently we come to a knot which we cannot disentangle, and which it would be impious to attempt to cut. You know not what your incidental and indirect relations to the great lines of history are. You may be startled some day to find how much you have been and how much you have done. And when you ask

how it is that this sudden renown has brought upon you the flame of immortality, the answer may be this : " Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Do not say that you are not upon the great lines of history, that you are not tributaries to the great river that seems to fray for itself an infinite channel through the earth, and pours its noble waters into a great sea. All rills trickle into the rivers. There is a royalty of mind as well as a royalty of blood. There is a royalty of behaviour as well as a royalty of descent. The question for each of us to consider is, whether we are acting up to the measure of our endowment and responsibility, and having answered that question in the affirmative, all the rest will be settled by the Supreme Power.

These words are spoken that I may break the spell of delusion and self-despair under which some men may be suffering. Do we not all suffer from that unhappy spell sometimes? Now and again we say, " Let the gourd wither, and let me cease to live, for all my efforts are but beatings of the air, and I seem to have no relation to the great currents and swift deep movements of Divine Providence—and why I am here at all I cannot tell : would God the sleeping hour would come, when I might fall off into an everlasting self-oblivion !" It is foolish talk. The very least of us has a mission to fulfil, a function to discharge, a reward to secure. Let me then, as an apostle of Christ, call upon myself, upon every other soul, to seize the privilege and magnify the office to which we are called by the All-wise and All-good Creator.

All generations travail in birth with one greater than themselves. The great man is not yet come, he is always coming. The Son of Man has come? Yes, but not in his glory. Christ has come? Yes, but in his everyday clothes, to begin his work, to give the earnest of his blood—but he is always coming. That was the explanation of apostolic fire and unquenchable enthusiasm, and it must be the explanation of the inspiring force under which our own life is stirred and whirled in its daily course. I am always looking for and hastening to the coming of Jesus Christ. He will never come as a man. He will come with a new coming, wider and more beautiful and satisfying than as a visible figure. Let those explain the meaning of such terms, who have felt what it is to have the heart move to apprehensions and seizures of realities for which there are no words. " Thy kingdom come." Do I thus pray for some great square figure to fall out of the blue heavens and establish itself upon wheels to roll round the earth? I pray, rather, for the infinite domination of ideas, purposes, and intentions of the most elevated and sacred kind. When Christianity comes, Christ will come : when the spirit of self-sacrifice has established itself upon the earth, then tell the heavens that the arrival has

been completed, and that earth is just outside heaven, sunned with all its light, and made tuneful with all its music.

I find from these genealogical records that the most illustrious lines often dip into strange places and seem to become lost in great moral swamps, so much so that it appears to be impossible they can ever be found again and re-united. There is many a bad man in this list. There are men here who have broken all the commandments of God. There are women here who have done the same. And yet the grand purpose moves on : it is not in the power of men's hands to break the threads of the divine purpose and scheme. The Saviour comes, notwithstanding at times the whole history seems to be depraved and utterly lost. I remark upon this fact the more pathetically because it is even so in the individual life. Sometimes we find ourselves where it seems to be impossible that God can ever find us more. Yet the life is redeemed with great cost to God, for he pays blood for blood, but his redeemed ones are not given over to the power of the destroyer. Cast down, but not destroyed ; smitten on the cheekbone, but not forsaken ; cursing, swearing, denying Christ with oaths and blasphemy, flat, black—and then saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." As the predicted man came through all the troubled lines, now illustrious with moral purity, now shamed with infinite disgrace, so through my life and thine, with all their slips and falls, their mighty prayers and horrible blasphemies, our better self shall come, the saint that is in us shall be delivered and nourished and perfected, and through our ungainly life, most depraved and occasionally most loathsome, there shall come that glorious body, that shining self, which is like Christ.

As I read this genealogy, I feel how true it is that grace is *not hereditary*. The good man, so good as to be almost an angel, has a son that shames the very genius of decency and insults with violence the very spirit of righteousness. This is a great mystery, that a mother, whose voice the angels might well mistake for a voice of their own, gives birth to a son that breaks her heart with his great wickedness. And a more astounding wonder still that a man whose name is a disgrace to humanity shall have a daughter beautiful as an angel, a son both philosopher and saint. Despise no man, blame no man, for circumstances over which he had no control, and praise no man for advantages which were thrust upon him without any spontaneity on his own part. Remember what your children may be ; though oftentimes your minds become shocked and confounded because it seems as if the divine purpose were broken off, know that God is at the head, and through all the process of the suns, his grand purpose is developing and widening itself. Judge not by the accident ; do not come to broad generalizations upon the circumstance of the passing moment ; remember that all history, all time, all influences are under divine moulding

and direction, and when God says "It is finished," he and the universe may hold quiet and solemn Sabbath together.

In reading further these genealogical records, I find that *Jesus Christ came through all sorts of people*. If I were minded to challenge him, I could upbraid him with some names that are here, and with cruel taunting I could add bitterness to his cup. He tells me that he came through all sorts to all sorts. It must be so with your life, if you are to be a great minister of God. You must not belong to any one class. You must have been depraved in your ancestors, however holy you are in yourself. O thou Son of Man, I have found thee, ancestrally, in the very pit of shame. What a history lay behind him: how he brought it all up into one focus and lived it over again in his tender sympathy, his universal understanding of human want, and his infinite beneficence whilst ministering to all classes of human kind. O thou art my preacher who comest up to every mood of my soul, so that when I am less than beast, thou knowest how to speak to me, and nearly angel, thou canst accost me in the better tongue.

This is the Christ that we preach, the Christ who came through all sorts of people, that he might teach and bless all sorts of people, so that you, wise sage, can go to him and find that your ingenuity is a blunder and your profundity the shallowest of surfaces—so that you, poor sinner, can go to him, and find him girded with a towel, ready to wash with water or with blood the stain that no other but himself can ever reach. And you too, little child, dear sweet little girl or boy, you can go to him, for he himself was the Child Jesus, and he knows everything that swells the child's breast and makes the child's eyes glisten and the child's soul laugh with glee. Behold, this is no class-man, no local deity, no special missionary, no man who can speak in one language only. His tabernacle is in the sun, and his speech as impartial and universal as the wind.

In looking still further into this genealogical table, I find that Jesus Christ did not always come through the eldest sons. Some of these names are the names of the eldest sons of their families and some are younger sons. God will not be bounded in his movements by our little laws of primogeniture and precedency. To-day he says, "I will go through the eldest son;" next time he says, "Younger son, come, I will elect thee." And thus he moves, not by our ceremonial arrangements, but by a grandeur and a sweep of movement which takes in all elements and all arrangements of human life, and gives a tender sanctity to the things that we often foolishly despise.

The question has arisen again and again as I have been perusing this genealogical table, Why did not Jesus Christ come *earlier*? Thus I come upon a mystery in Divine Providence. Jesus Christ came before he came in the flesh. I want you, therefore, to recall the very first lesson of the morning, that as he comes now, since his flesh was buried, so he came be-

fore his incarnation in Bethlehem. Said he, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day." As a Guest, a nameless Presence, a wrestling Angel, a Cloud by day, a Fire by night, an Eye in the wheels of the chariots of Israel, in a thousand ways he came to the olden church, in a thousand ways he comes to the baptized church of to-day. Have all your doors and windows open, for you cannot tell by what means he will find access to your individual life or to your organized existence as churches. Be ready for him. What I say unto one I say unto all, Watch.

Let me say that there is a record in which even *our* names may all be found. Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. Let every soul remember that his name may be written in the Lamb's book of Life. When the Saviour was told that his mother and other relatives stood without, desiring to see him, he said, "Who is my mother and who are my brethren? Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother." So we may all be in the genealogical tree of which he is the root: we may all be in the great sky, as little stars indeed, of which he is the central and inextinguishable glory.

II.

CHRIST'S BIRTH ALWAYS A MIRACLE—THE GARDEN OF EDEN—THE PERPLEXITY OF JOSEPH—THE MINISTRY OF DREAMS—REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER—GENESIS AND MATTHEW COMPARED—MATTER ORDERED : MAN EDUCATED—THE MORAL VALUE OF TIME—THE REASON OF DIVINE DELAY—THE TWO BEGINNINGS ARE ONE.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who can speak like thee? There is music in thy voice and there is infinite tenderness in every tone which thou dost breathe into the listening heart. Thy words are full of hope : thou dost bring a great brightness to shine upon our dark life, and in many a prophetic word thou dost cause us to forecast the morning and rejoice in the broad light of boundless day. Thou hast never withheld the word of hope from the race of mankind. In the hour of sadness and intolerable depression thou hast caused thy voice to be heard, promising that the light shall come and that the glory of the Lord shall fill the earth. We bless thee that we have seen the fulfilment of thy promises : we live in the cloudless noontide : Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour, has come in all the plenitude of his redeeming power, and after his descent upon us there can be no more night on earth. May we receive him as men receive the light who have been long waiting for it : worn out, wearied, and sleep-bound, we rejoice when thou dost come to us with rest, security, and peace. We rejoice when the light calls us to renewed duty and to rekindled hope. May the Son of the Father, the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords be born again in our hearts every day. May our breasts be the Bethlehem of his incarnation, and may our life be the sphere of his illuminating and redeeming ministry.

For his great glad words we bless thee : they are sweeter to our taste than honey, yea than the honeycomb. For his simple but infinite sayings that touch our whole life how can we praise thee enough? We live upon them as upon living bread sent down from heaven ; they are our joy and song, they are our strength and security, they are the answer to every hard question, they are the light which turns every mystery into a blessing. We assemble around his cross, we see the tragedy of his suffering, we feel the meaning of his agony—it was for us he thus endured the cursed tree, he was delivered for our offences, he suffered, the Just for the unjust. Evermore draw us away with infinite constraint of love from the foolish delusion that we could have saved ourselves, bind us with ever deepening and ever purifying loyalty to Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, infinite in his redeeming power.

We need this gospel all our life long, but specially in hours of agony when our sin is heavy upon us and our remorse doth eat as a canker and our conscience is as a flaming fire within us, and all life gathers itself up into an unanswerable accusation. Then may we hide ourselves in thy wounded side, Messiah, Son of God. We humbly implore thee to guide us during our life. It is a life that is reckoned in days : behold it is

in the power of man to tell us how many breaths there are in our seventy years. We count our small life by its single respirations—we know not that we may ever draw another breath. Our house is built half over the grave, and at any time the other half may be engulfed in the great tomb. Help us then to live wisely, with sobriety of heart, with dignity of purpose, with obedience of will, having no will or mind of our own, but seeking to live thy will and to breathe all thy purpose. Thou didst make us and not we ourselves : we are thine, we are not our own, therefore would we resign to thee that which never belonged to us, and our prayer would sum itself up in this one desire, namely, not my will but thine be done.

Thou hast clothed us with great and terrible power ; thou hast enabled us to blaspheme thy name ; thou hast so made us that we can curse thee to thy face ; thou hast given us that power, almost divine, which enables us to lift ourselves up in haughty pride and daring, so that we may challenge thy supremacy. We have played the actor well ; our hypocrisy has been a life-long success ; we have spoken the language of selfishness with the accent of sacrifice ; we have hidden the gems and the garments we have stolen, and our wealth is a great theft. Behold our life lies naked before thee, a throbbing, black, horrible lie. Our prayers are aggravations, and our piety but a refined sin. O thou who hast the atoning blood, the riven heart, out of which alone there streams the river that can cleanse the defilement of mankind—let us know the cleansing power of that precious blood.

We put ourselves and one another confidently and affectionately into thine hands : deal with us as thou dost see best : keep us here or send us yonder as may be right in thy sight, not in ours. Make our house larger and multiply our estate greatly, or diminish both and send us into blankness and poverty, if it be for our soul's health. Grant unto our counsels and devices great success and abundant honour, or drive them all back again into our open windows that they may be ours without result, if so be our life may thereby be saved.

Pity us in our distresses, laugh not at us from the heavens derisively when we try to climb and then ignominiously fall, but lift us with strong and healing hands and set us where thou wouldst have us be, and not our will but thine be done, again and again we say. We have no better prayer : it is not ours, it is thy Son's. Amen.

MATTHEW ii. 18-25.

18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise : When as his mother Mary (probably an orphan, as her parents are not mentioned) was espoused (for a whole year during which the bride and bridegroom elect did not meet) to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19. Then Joseph her husband (so called among the Jews from the moment of betrothal), being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20. But while he thought (was distracted and perplexed) on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife : for that which is conceived (begotten) in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS (not yet a specially sacred name) ; for he shall save his people from their sins.

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying :

23. Behold, a virgin [*ἡ παρθένος*—the virgin, or “even a virgin”] shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife :

25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son : and he called his name JESUS.

FROM this time human history takes a new departure. How otherwise would you have Christ come? You suggest a difficulty or two as to the acceptance of the story we have read : will you be good enough to suggest another story by which we shall escape all difficulty, the object being to bring into the human race a man different from all other men, and yet a Saviour and Redeemer of all mankind? How will you escape difficulty in carrying out that grand design? It is not enough for us to criticise the method by which Jesus Christ was declared to have come into the world ; we ought to go one step further if we can, and that is to suggest a method which would have been clear of every difficulty, and which yet would have obviously covered the whole ground and accomplished the one supreme design. We are awaiting suggestions ; as soon as the right ones come we shall know them : we cannot mistake true music, we shall know whether the wind comes along the earth and brings the earth's dust with it, or whether it comes resoundingly from the heavens and brings with it voices and utterances of the upper and better world. Observe what had to be done : a Redeemer like ourselves in all points had to be introduced into the race, and yet so unlike us as to be wholly separate from sinners. Put that problem distinctly before your mind, and answer how it could have been accomplished as a grand historical success, except on the basis which is laid down in the Evangelic narrative.

Wherever Christ is born it is a miracle. When he is born in us it is by a miraculous conception. You do not suppose that a man becomes a Christian by some simple and obvious method which anybody can suggest and which any mind can fathom and understand? When Christ is born in your heart and mine, precisely the same operation is gone through as is indicated in this opening chapter of the gospel. It is an unexpected event, it is an event brought about by the overshadowing and ministry of the Holy Ghost. It is associated with ineffable joy, it enlists the co-operation of the angels in lifting up our gladness to its true pitch of utterance. The language of the gospel is only romantic and intellectually distressing to those who bring to bear upon it nothing but the effort of an unassisted mind. Regarded sympathetically, seized emotionally, read in the light of our own individual experience, no other language can so adequately and correctly set forth the infinite wonder and the ineffable emotion as that which we find in the gospel story. Moreover, it is in the line of the divine development, it is in harmony with the creation of the first Adam : out of the dust was brought the man, out of the man was brought the woman, out

of the woman was brought the Son, out of the Son is brought the Church, which is his body, the glory of his ministry, the conquest of his almighty arm. It is all one line, beginning in the dust, ending where God ends, a development historical, gradual, sequential, complete. In very deed, great is the mystery of godliness.

Human history then, I repeat, breaks away into a new line at this point, namely, the 18th verse of the first chapter of the gospel by Matthew. The great exception takes place here. From this moment human history has an upward direction, and focalises itself in a personality hitherto but dimly indicated by the voice of often enigmatical prophecy. There are such distinct points of departure in your life and mine. The point of departure, therefore, given by the Evangelist, ought not to startle us as though it had no analogy or confirmation in human experience. I object to the law which says that it can receive nothing that has not a counterpart in human consciousness and experience, because human consciousness and experience may yet have themselves to enlarge : they have not reached the highest and last point of their own development. On the other hand, I would call attention to the fact that there are a great many things within human consciousness and experience which are not distinctly recognised as being there. Why recoil from the first chapter of the book of Genesis or the first chapter of the gospel by Matthew? If I regard these chapters in a merely literal and verbal way, I am filled with distress. If I regard them sympathetically, and in the light of what takes place in the dim sanctuary of my own consciousness, I understand them every whit. That subtle old serpent, the devil, has talked to me. I do not ask the naturalist to tell me whether, by the conformation of the serpent's mouth, it was possible for the serpent to practise the utterance of articulate language : that is the question of a mountebank. The serpent has spoken with fatal eloquence to every man amongst us. Object to the *figure*, if you like, but the grim, stern, damning *fact* remains. And as to the tree in the midst of the garden, and the fiery, flaming sword and guarding cherubim, I know them. It is impossible to get back to the lost chance, it is impossible to sponge out one spot of crime, it is impossible to find the way to the tree we have once despoiled. To try it is to fight with fire, and the fire roots itself in the inextinguishable furnaces of the divine anger.

And in very deed, if I go further back still, and think of man being shaped out of the dust, I know it : I feel the dust, I feel the DEITY too. I know it must have been out of the deepest dust of the earth some parts of my nature were made, and I also know that there burns within me a fire which only God could have lighted. Observe, therefore, that I do not go back with the grammarian and the pedantic etymologist and ask those teachers to be kind enough to explain to me the opening chapters of Genesis or the opening chapters of human life in any of its grand beginnings and developings. I

go down there alone, all silent, all wondering, and MYSELF is the best annotation. So it is with this opening chapter of the gospel of Matthew. Jesus Christ is born in me, and a new departure is taken in my life by processes which can never be explained in words. In your development from infancy to spiritual manhood there comes in the story this all-separating—"NOW." When did it enter? You cannot tell. The chronometer has not yet been made that indicates these millionths of seconds in which great divine ministrations accomplish themselves in births that have no deaths. Have we passed from death unto life? Has Christ been born in us the hope of glory?

Read the chapter still further until you see the wonderful union in Christ of the human and the divine—the human on the mother's side, the divine as indicated by the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost. This was no imaginary Mary. This literal history was required in order to vindicate her memory from the charge of her being a merely dramatic woman. She was real, like ourselves, one of us; she lived the common human life, wept the common human tears, enjoyed the same enjoyments that fall to our lot: there is enough said about her in the gospels to prove the pure human nature of the woman, and little enough said about her not to magnify her into a feminine god. She is here long enough to be seen, understood, spoken about, attested, initialled by every witness that knows human nature, and behold she is *gone!* The mother of Emmanuel must not remain *too long*: she must be before my eye long enough for me to know that she is Mary, and none other: not a theatrical woman or a paper minister, conceived by the wild imagination of a delirious theology, but a WOMAN, a sister, a friend, a sufferer, a loving one—and then she must go, and I cannot tell how. Buried without a funeral, buried without a grave, buried without an epitaph—gone, and the eye cannot follow the swift movement of her translation.

As for the operation of the Holy Ghost, it begins and ends in the word *miracle*. Yet it, too, is a miracle which has its correspondence in our own nature. I cannot tell the source of my prayers. When I pray with you, it is not I praying, it is a voice I never heard before in that same tone. When I close my eyes to lead you upward, is it by some utterance I have committed to memory, some paragraphs I have formulated in the library, some sentences I have caught and detained as friends? God forbid. *It is a birth of the Holy Ghost.* The poor words, half dumb, and trembling through and through with a throb of conscious weakness, may be partly mine, but the thing they labour to say I know not. Can you tell me the genesis, and give me the roots and starting fibres of all the purposes that have distinguished your life and made it as a flame of sacred fire, burning upward unto the heavens? You can rehearse to me the history of your commerce, and even that you can give in some instances only in part, for

you know not whence the brightest suggestions came. You can tell me somewhat of the outward history of your life and body during the day—as to where you have been and partly what you have seen ; but even then the story is remarkable mainly for its incompleteness. Behind, and around, and above there are forces and ministries which have entered as living factors in all you have done, for which you have no name—forces that have broken your thigh in the night's wrestling, but left you in the morning with a nobler name.

Such is the work of the Holy Ghost. It is not to be settled in language. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof ; thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit. We *prove* our birth, we do not explain it. I cannot tell you how I came to be ; the Lord help every one of us to vindicate his being by temper pure as fire, by love noble as sacrifice !

There was one man who looked on with great wonder. All the ages have crowded around that man, and, so to speak, have thronged him into an infinite multitude, all looking on with the same amazement, all distracted by the same perplexity. Joseph knew not what angel was coming to him along the crooked lines of his mental distraction. We seem to be born to misunderstand everything that is at all great and noble : we cannot understand ourselves, we can give but foolish answers to all the great questions which relate to our own being and our own destiny. No man yet ever satisfied his friend fully and left him in the position in which he could ask no question or suggest no doubt regarding any movement in life which was really tragical, involving suffering when that suffering might have been escaped. You are looking at your life as a great perplexity. God delights in our embarrassments : you cannot see how this knot can be untied, and you feel that it would be impious to attempt to cut it. Be in no haste. I have had a thousand knots like that in my life. When I touched them my fingers were too soft to get hold of the lines that bound them together in hardness. When I have called for steel, I have been guilty consciously of a coward's trick, and the angel has said, "Do not cut it : let it alone : the answer of all things is not yet ; in due time that knot shall prove itself to be part of the strange but ever beneficent ministry of the divine and Holy Father."

A most remarkable reason is given why the name should be called *Jesus*. Referring to the 21st verse, you will find that the reason is, "for he shall save his people from their sins." Christ is the only man known in history who was born with specific and exclusive reference to the sins of the human family. He does not come into the race with a small programme. The world had sickened at its heart of programmes an inch long ; in its intolerable soreness of soul it could not have endured another. Make way : here is a man who is going to remove the dust from our house windows. We are glad to see him. Make way again : here is a man who is going to

remove the dust from our doorstep. Welcome to him also. Again and again make way for a thousand men, each of whom has a short purpose and a superficial programme. So far as they go we bid each a cordial welcome. But when all the thousand have done their little work, and have gone away from our door, we feel that ANOTHER must come with some fuller purpose, with some grander ministry. I thank all men who have done anything for me, but there is a fire in me that is burning up my life—who is to put that out? For all temporary mitigations of suffering I am thankful, but there is an asp biting my soul and I am dying of its injected poison. Who can touch a mind diseased? This Son of Mary, Son of God, comes with the avowed purpose of *doing this very thing I want to have done*. By so much, therefore, as he even *seems* to rise to the dignity of the occasion, I hail him, for he has caught the genius of my malady—perhaps he may bring with him the one remedy. If he had made light of my disease, I should have run away from him, for he had not then understood me. If he had come with light and jaunty words upon his lips, I should have called him liar, and found the evidence in his tone. But when he meets me he says the case is grave, the case is fatal, the disease is sin, the malady is in the soul, the blood is tainted, the life is rotten, the burden is grievous. I say to him, as a mere man, “Sir, thou understandest me: what is the answer to all this suffering?” And when he says “*Blood*,” I feel that we are grappling with a Man that has at all events the right words. Let him prove them—then will he be the crowned Saviour of the race, and his name shall be worn by no thief, but by himself only, every other Jesus forgotten in him whose surname is Christ.

All that we have now read was done in fulfilment of *prophecy*. God does not work extemporaneously, the suddenness of his movements is only apparent; every word he says comes up from eternity around the birth-place of Jesus Christ. There assembled the prophets and the minstrels of ancient time. “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.” The prophets were misunderstood men; they seemed to sing a song which found an entrance into no heart. Their forecasts were met with derisive laughter, their vaticinations were but the complaints of a disordered and unbalanced mind, and many a time, wrapping their mantles around them, travel-stained, they lay down, saying, “Would God the prophetic afflatus had never moved me to speech.” Prophets always suffer. It is a crucifixion to be born before your time. Happy he who speaks the language of the day: popular as a god is he. The man who projects himself by divine energy through centuries ahead, dies a thousand deaths. The prophets suffered for us: Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and the mighty tribe of men who never spake to their own day, but shot their thunder voices across the ages, died for us. They have their reward. I cannot think of them as dead dust, scattered upon the winds and going to make

up some other man's grave, and there an end of them. I must, following the instinct of justice and nobleness of compensation, think of them as seeing the triumphs they predicted, and turning into songs all the tears and woes that afflicted them during their misunderstood ministry.

Joseph was put to sleep by God, and was talked to through the medium of a dream. It is God's old plan : He puts us into a deep sleep, and behold when we come out of it, there is the beautiful companionship of our life standing before us, or there is the great answer to a small difficulty that turned our life into a sharp pain, or there is the way out of an entanglement difficult as a labyrinth, puzzling as a thicket, devised by all the cunning cruelty of our worst enemies. Sometimes I have done as you have ; many a time fallen off into sleep, quite unable to do the work that was pressing upon me. A refreshing slumber has blessed the brain, has wound it up in every energy and force, and the awakening has been as a resurrection, and we have gone to the work that defied us, and lo, in the hands recovered by sleep there has been cunning enough to lift the burden, or to dispel the difficulty, and we, who had fainted in weariness, rejoiced in a renewed and apparently inexhaustible strength.

We are most *alone* when we are asleep. God loves to speak to us in our loneliness. We are more spiritual when we are asleep than when we are awake. When I am awake I have to do with all this world ; I am lost and dazed amid countless eyes that are watching ; I am struck by a million wonders that challenge my attention ; my ears are filled with countless noises that fall upon one another and make rough tumult in my soul. God says to me, "Come into the darkness, and I will close thine eyelids and speak to thee alone." If you ask me if I believe in dreams, taking the word dream in its wholeness, I say no : if you ask me if I believe in particular dreams, I say yes. Who would give up his dream life ? In the dream life we are larger than in our waking hours. In dream I float through the air by easy and pleasant levitation ; I move across difficulties I dare not encounter when I am awake. In dreams I step from star to star and cross the horizon at a bound. I know that these things appear to me in a light almost laughable when I awake, yet in my better thinking I get out of them hints, hints that startle me, make me think of possibilities which never come within the dull routine of life, and which have no place in the reckonings of the book-makers.

Thank God for sleep, thank God for dreams, thank God for every ministry that gets you out of your littleness. If any minister of God in any church can charm you away from your counter and your desk, and make you feel even for one moment that the universe is larger than you had supposed it to be, go and hear that man : he is your soul's true friend. If by tone of the voice, if by vehemence of appeal, if by tender-

ness of prayer, he can turn you to an upward look, he is God's minister to your soul. Love him, honour him. You may disagree with him in many of his words, some of his propositions you may be quite unable to accept from an intellectual point of view; again and again he may provoke you into controversy by statements that appear to you either rash or irreconcilable; but by as much as he has the power to make you look up and see God's wonders in the heavens, and to excite in you a desire to be broader and nobler than you are, is he the anointed minister of God to you, and should be received as such. I read the books that make me larger, I follow the authors that tell me of bigger things than I have yet seen, I love the souls that lure me into sleep that is enriched with dreaming, that extends the horizon, and doubles the stars, and heightens the sky in which they shine. From such companionship I return saying, "I have seen heaven's gate open to-day, and there are lines in this universe that were never dreamed of before in my philosophy."

Thus, then, Jesus Christ comes into the world. We have now, from time to time, to follow him in his wondrous ministry. I will not attempt to prove the miracle of the incarnation by any verbal argument, but I will ask him to meet us here morning by morning, and to vindicate, by the eloquence of his own speech and the marvellousness of his own action, the claim that is set up for him in this chapter—that he is at once the Son of Mary and the begotten of the Holy Ghost.

REVIEW OF THE WHOLE CHAPTER.

You will find it a delightful and profitable study to look at the first chapter of Genesis and the first chapter of Matthew together. I have found it useful to read the one chapter immediately after the other. The contrast between Genesis and Matthew is most vivid, and in some points most startling. In both cases you have what is termed the *Beginning*—a term that cannot be *defined*. There are compasses, one point of which we can lay upon these terms, but the other point cannot be stretched to the full extent of their meaning. Both chapters, with a most startling audacity, give us a point to begin at: they create history, they draw a line and say, "History begins here." How far the beginning is right has to be ascertained by long continued investigation. No answer can be immediately given to the bold assumption: it must be found in the course of persistent and enlightend inquiry. Let us, having read both the chapters, look at some of the points of contrast and some of the points of union, and learn as the result of our study how with completeness the Bible confirms itself and challenges attention to points which lie below the surface and are likely to elude the most watchful criticism that is not inspired by the purest desires of the heart.

In the first chapter of Genesis, we see how order and beauty were brought out of confusion, and in the other how spiritual harmony was brought out of infinite discord. In Genesis you have chaos turned into cosmos, in Matthew you have a tumultuous, fierce, rebellious humanity, shaped into dignity and worship, and blessed with the completeness of rest. If these chapters were mere poetry, I should be struck with the manner in which both the conceptions are expressed. The manner is, in this case, nothing less than an argument. This to my mind is one of the most beautiful of the incidental illustrations of the truth of the Bible. In the first instance we have to deal with *matter*. What is the tone in which matter is dealt with? It is a tone of command, it is a fiat. Put into words, the words would be—Let it be done. There is no consultation, there is no entreaty, there is no persuasion, there is no remonstrance. The fiat is omnific. As a mere question of poetic conception this manner is equal to the occasion. When we go into the region of matter, we do not say "If you please;" we stand above it, we command it. This is a fact of our own consciousness and experience. When you want to shape that long stretch of iron into an arch, what do you say? You say precisely what is said in the first chapter of Genesis. You cannot get away from this biblical tether, you say "Let it be done." Is your tone one of beseeching entreaty—do you ask the iron to be kind enough to allow itself to be moulded into an arch? When you want the quarry to yield you stones wherewith to build a temple, what say you? You copy the first chapter of the book of Genesis: you are biblical without the Bible, the tone cannot be changed, you say "Let it be done," and therein you echo the fiat that rounded the heavens and populated the seas.

This then is true to our own consciousness and experience. I say, "Let my house be built, let it be decorated, let it be richly furnished, let it be thus and so." Why is my tone so dogmatic and positive? Because I am within a region where the human will is supreme. You may remind me of incidental circumstances, and I am not oblivious of them, but their being in the case as details does not for one moment alter the principle which I am endeavouring to elucidate, namely, that wherever mere matter is concerned, our *will* determines its uses. There shall be a bridge across that river, there shall stand a temple on that site, there shall be a picture on that wall. So far as the matter is one purely materialistic, the will is supreme, the word creates, the word determines.

In the second case, it is not matter that is dealt with, but *manhood*. How different is the process, how long the delay, how intricate the method, how innumerable and subtle the perils. Instead of commanding, we have persuasion, entreaty, nurture, encouragement, even the whole ministry of long-suffering patience and all-hoping love. Looking at this also as a mere conception of manner, how true it is to our own consciousness and

experience and method. You can order a coat for your child—you cannot order a character. You can command a *dress* to be fashioned, you cannot command an *education* to be received, except in the only sense, namely, the mechanical, which proves, by a still broader illustration, the very principle on which I am insisting. You can decorate your house with a word, you cannot decorate your child's intellectual nature—nay, you cannot decorate his back without his consent. He tears your jewelled rags from his shoulders, throws them on the ground, steps on them and defies you.

Look, therefore, at both the chapters as indicating a *wide contrast of manner*, a contrast arising from the fact that in the one case it is *matter* that is being treated, and in the other case it is *manhood* that is being created and trained and completed. Can you amend this method? You give orders for a *building*, you cannot give orders for a *soul*. You will go to your desk to-morrow morning, and with one scratch of your pen you will *order* work for a thousand pounds, or ten thousand, to be done, and you properly say you have given the *order*. If you understood the meaning of your own music, you would be taken back to the first chapter of Genesis and set down there repeating the first words—you have never got beyond that liberty! You will come home after having given your *order*, and you will have, with your children round about you, to ask their *consent* to kiss them. It is no kiss upon the child's lip that is given by force—a kiss of the flesh, not a kiss of the soul. Then you will come into the first chapter of Matthew, and find how, by wondrous processes, too subtle to be caught in iron speech, hearts are won, characters are formed, and destinies are determined.

It is by these practical illustrations that I find, again and again, how unexpectedly and wondrously the Bible is confirmed, and how our liberty is restricted by a history thousands of years old. We think we do some things by our own ingenuity and by our own strength, and again and again we are reminded that our originality is stale and our wit a borrowed dart.

If we look at these two chapters side by side from another point of view, we shall find that in both cases the events spread themselves, as to their execution, over vast periods of time. As for the creation, the date is—"in the beginning." Search your calendar for that line, or put a better line in its place. Man likes to know details simply because he is *himself* a detail. But as he grows in the knowledge of God, and in the completeness of his purposed character, viewed in the light of the divine will, he finds that detail is but a momentary convenience. Observe how profoundly true this is also to our own consciousness and experience. Time represents value. We have a saying amongst ourselves to the effect that *time is money*. Time is more, time represents value : the political econ-

omist says that money is nothing, a mere token or symbol, of that which money can purchase—the value is not in the money, it is in the production. And a greater teacher than the political economist tells us that time is nothing; I must look at what time represents: a day is not the same thing to the idle man that it is to the man who is busy.

Lay it down broadly that *time represents value*. “Why,” said an artist no sooner born than dead, to a great painter, “do you spend so much time upon your pictures?” The profound and courteous answer was, “Because I paint for immortality.” And as a man soweth so shall he also reap. “And why,” said one who looked upon a great sculptor, “are you spending so much time over that face? I saw it a month ago, and it seemed to be as far advanced in its formation as it is now.” “No,” said Angelo, “I have been rounding that cheek, and giving a little additional expression to that nostril, and bringing out that under part of the eye more clearly.” Said the observer, “These are but trifles.” “True,” answered the great man of the chisel, “these are trifles, but trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.” Thus to the wise time represents value. We say of some buildings that they have been run up in the night time, and when we pass that commentary upon them, we mean it as a sneer, or as an indication of the estimate we place upon the value of the thing done. We call such buildings shells, we say they will need repair in a month or two—no time has been spent upon them, and for no time will they endure.

The expenditure of time, therefore, must have a *moral value* yet to be discovered. What time was spent on building the universe! Men who have made the universe from that point of view a special study, say that the earth must have taken tens of thousands of ages to build. They ridicule the notion of a six thousand-years-old globe: they take me down as far as they can to the roots of the rocks and show me the stony registers, pile on pile, where the ages are buried under unsculptured stone. When I compare these wondrous things with what I know to be true in my own consciousness and experience, I reason thus:—Time represents value: a man spends time upon the outworking of a purpose according to the value he sets upon it: if thousands of ages have been sown upon these barren fields, God’s meaning in that scattering of the ages upon a rocky surface must be profound and is not now to be understood or explained.

Yet to one test I can put this expenditure of time. It is a common test: it is in use amongst ourselves; we apply it to all things, perhaps even to the most sacred. I can stand on the green surface of the earth and look up into the starry roof, and ask what has come of all this time, what is the *success* which has attended this infinite delay? Then comes to my waiting mind and heart the great answer:—“Canst thou amend anything that is within thy reach, O man? Stoop down and pluck thee a grass-blade from thy feet, look at it and say whether thou couldst sharpen it to a finer point,

fill it with more delicate blood, clothe it with a tenderer bloom, make it in any respect more beautiful? Look at the sun : canst thou sphere him out into a more perfect circle, or add one ray to his effulgence, or suggest a supplement to his infinitude of light?" These questions are put to me with courteousness, yet reading between the lines I feel that they mock me like a defiant thunder. Then I come to the conclusion that time represents value. I cannot paint the lily without painting upon it my own folly. I cannot suggest a single re-adaptation of any of the functions of my body, I cannot add a healthier colour to my blood, I cannot fix my eyes so as to see better than they now see the wonders of this gallery and museum of things infinite and grand. I cannot *amend* God's work. It is to this little test, yet not useless, that I can bring this marvellous fact of the expenditure of what to us is an eternity, in the building up of a globe that holds upon its face all that is beautiful of summer, and hides in its kind heart all that is ghastly in death.

The Lord having thus made me a universe says, "My child, this is a symbol : this is not made for its own sake, this is meant to teach thee great lessons ; it is my board of illustration ; I have inscribed the heavens and the earth with innumerable sermons, and lessons, and poems and parables—go thou and find them out, write them in thine own speech, and make thyself glad in this deep and gracious study." He is also building a spiritual universe, and it takes him a long time to construct it. He is making Man, and man takes more making than all the stars that throw their light on space. Why, this is true at home : you made your carpet, and your table, and your pictures, and your china in no time ; you sent them back and had them altered : but your child, the son that has never yet stooped in filial worship at your knee ; that daughter, bad with a fire your love has been unable to quench ; that will that seems to hold you at its cruel mercy—there your efforts appear to have been wasted.

I might argue that as it has taken God a long time to build *creation*, so it takes Him a long time to build the higher creation of *manhood*. I set up no such contention, nor dare I avail myself of any such illustration. The rocks require long time, but *they cannot be damned*. What care I if we pile eternities upon them? They cannot *suffer*. But man dies and goes to hell ! To me, therefore, some tenderer and deeper argument must be addressed than the argument of analogy from the long periods required for physical formations, and the spaces and periods of time required for the development of moral harmony and beauty. I find the necessity for the expenditure of long time, in myself, in my moral nature. I will *not let* God complete his work. I find the reason of the delay in me, *not in him*.

Nor need this be considered as a piece of theological metaphysics. It is a piece of matter-of-fact life. Every one now hearing me I could sum-

mon as a witness to bear testimony to the fact that to do right is not pleasant to any of us. If the religion of Jesus Christ is to be discounted or set aside simply because it takes a long time to make itself universally felt in the world, then with it, by parity of reasoning, must go down everything that is beautiful and noble in human education, morals, and progress. Do not suppose that your blow terminates upon the faith of Jesus Christ when you say that if that faith were divine it would make more rapid progress in the world. That blow, if it have any effect at all, shatters the entire temple of beauty, morals, and all that goes to make up completeness of human character. We all agree, for example, that honesty is right and good. Not one dissentient voice is raised to that proposition. But, according to the reasoning by which you wish to upset the divinity of Christ's religion, honesty cannot be good, otherwise every man would be honest. We are all further agreed that temperance is excellent, self-control, personal moderation, having all our faculties, passions, fires of our nature under our entire dominion and sway. To that proposition not one single dissentient voice is raised. But, according to the reasoning referred to, *temperance cannot be a good thing*, otherwise every man would practise it. The very fact that it is rejected, would, according to the reasoning now in question, upset the claim of temperance to be a virtue at all. We are all agreed that cleanliness is beneficial to health: we say properly that without cleanliness there can be no permanent health. That proposition is unanimously carried in every intelligent assembly; but if I am to avail myself of the reasoning which is now levelled against the divinity of Christ's religion, then I reply, cleanliness cannot be beneficial, otherwise every man, woman, and child would instantly be cleanly. Every man, woman, and child is not cleanly, therefore cleanliness cannot be the excellent thing you try to prove it to be.

So with the pleas of God, the expostulations of the Most High, and the offers of the gospel—they all fall into the ruck of these common reasonings, and I, who have been convicted on every point of the former indictment, am convicted with a ten thousand fold conviction upon the supreme point of all, namely, that God waits to be gracious, and I keep him waiting.

But as in the former case of the creation, so in this latter case of the completeness of the human character, the result will be worthy of him who has been conducting the process. I cannot amend his heavens, add a deeper tint of blue to his sky, increase the richness of the green which he has spread over the earth, suggest an improvement to a single sporule of moss or blade of grass, or feather on bird's wing. In all these things I have to say "It is very good." If amendment might be possible, not on my side has the possibility been realized. So he will build this other creation, the great house of Manhood, the infinite temple of redeemed and sanctified humanity, and when it is done he will say, "It is very good, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, complete,

rhythmic, restful, majestic, immortal." I must, therefore, make right use of the material symbol, and translate it into its highest spiritual meanings. I look for new heavens and a new earth and a new Jerusalem, a church beautiful as the Lamb that redeemed it.

This brings me to the last point of contrast which I can now notice, namely, that in the first chapter of Genesis the endeavour, the process rather, is to *make* man, in Matthew the object is to REDEEM man. In the first instance, we had no part or lot. If you will search into this matter, you will find how at all points you are restricted and humbled, so far as your birth is concerned. For a moment look at this matter. You are *born* without your own will, configured without your own consent: whether you were to be dark or fair, tall or short, strong or weak—not a word had you in that solemn covenant. You were *nationalised* without your own consent; you were not asked, "Will you be born in the temperate zone, or in the torrid zone? Will you be born in a little island or in a broad continent? Will you prefer to be an Englishman or a Turk—an Indian or an African?" In that destiny you had neither part nor lot. Why, your consent was not asked even to the *name* you bear! You were born, nationalised, named, and over these things you had no control whatsoever. How wondrously we are limited on that side of our nature, yet on the other what marvellous freedom we have! We who can curse God to his face, cannot add one cubit to our stature. We who can say "No" to all the eloquence of the divine love, cannot make one hair white or black. Calvinism is true, and Arminianism is true, and they are both in the Bible, and they are both in your life. Limit and liberty, law and freedom, you find everywhere. You are pinned down and cannot break the pin. Yet you have tether enough to give you the notion of infinite freedom.

We were no parties to our being *made*, we are asked to be parties to our being *redeemed*. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Whosoever believeth shall not perish but have everlasting life. Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life. How often would I have gathered thee, but thou wouldst not.

I have spoken of two beginnings, yet the two are but one, Jesus Christ is not a point in history, he is the point which antedates all history. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us. He is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. He created all things, and he is before all things and by him all things consist. When, therefore, we speak of the beginning of the gospel as subsequent to the beginning of creation, we only use a phrase for human convenience. The *divine* meanin^g is that all things begin in God, and that God never began.

III.

THE CULTURE OF THE YOUNG—THE REASON OF CHRIST'S SOVEREIGNTY— FLATTERING CHRIST—CHRIST HIMSELF IS WITH MEN.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for psalm and gospel ; we thank thee that the olden men were enabled to speak their heart's life in holy psalm. Though they saw not the King, yet did they speak tunefully of him : it was in no mean praise they forecasted the coming One. Thou didst give them music, music of heart and voice—lo, in that music they all but realized the ineffable joy of the divine presence upon the earth. It is thus thou dost ever treat us : thou dost give us means of utterance which are themselves sacred, and in the very utterance of our prayer thou dost give us sweet answers. We bless thee that we have read the word of the gospel, spoken in no poetry of expression, but in the poetry of fact, for we have seen Jesus, and his star, we have been present at the offering of the first worship to the child—may that worship be the keynote of our life, expressing always our uppermost desire : may it be our joy to be found serving no other master, and loyally bending before no other king. We will have this Man to reign over us by thy grace, yea, though we once rejected his dominion, yet now would we contritely and humbly welcome him. We would live in Christ, for Christ would we live, we would be found in him as the branch is found in the vine, drawing our life and its daily sustenance from him who is the one root. Seeing that this is our desire and that it has risen into a prayer, we accept the prayer as the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, and knowing it to be inspired, we are already assured of thine infinitely gracious answer. We would no longer live in ourselves and to ourselves. We would enter into fellowship with Christ in every pang of his suffering and in every ecstasy of his joy. Let this our prayer be answered to-day, and we shall rejoice with exceeding great joy, yea our satisfaction and gladness shall be full.

For all the mercies of another week we bless thee. Thou hast given us a staff to help us along every difficult road, thou hast set lights above us in the time of darkness, in the hour of solitude ; thou hast spread companionships for our souls, yea all thine angels have ministered unto us, and because of their society we have not the pain or the temptation of loneliness ; thou hast given us food convenient for us ; thou hast not neglected us in any point or in any degree whatsoever, thy ministry towards us has been one of overflowing love, we are to-day the living, the living to praise thee with new and richer song for all thy kindness, for thy patience, thy tender mercy. Evermore fill us with a sense of thy presence, let a consciousness of thy nearness destroy all fear of man, let it expel from our heart everything that is of the earth, earthy, and fill us with high desire to enlarge our capacity and to discharge with a more ardent zeal all the obligations of this life.

We mourn our sin : it makes our tongue black to mention our iniquities, and our

lips quiver under the infinite distress of their burden. We know not where to begin, and beginning, we should never end, for our breath is tainted with corruption, our every thought is borne downward to the dust, our prayers are mingled with earthliness: we cannot escape this bondage except by thy grace, thou loving one, who didst die for us and rise again, to lead us to the noblest conquests. Let thy grace abound over our sin, we now penitently and humbly entreat thee; let the cross of Christ rear itself above all our iniquity, and have written above all the superscription of Pilate the great welcome of thy love, and the gracious assurance of thy pardon.

Enable us to live our few days in peace and quietness, in zeal for all godliness, in diligent and honest service in thy kingdom. Seeing that our days are few, and that they are flying whilst we mourn over their brevity, we may gird up our loins and be instant in season and out of season, doing thy will with lowly patience and with confident trust.

According to our individual necessities, let thy gospel come to us this day. Thou knowest the prayers we cannot utter, thou understandest the thoughts for which there is no language. We ask thee now to come into our heart, to see our need exactly as it is, and to supply our want out of thy great grace.

In our prayer we would remember our loved ones who are not with us, the children too young to come, the sick and the weary, shut up, in pain, desiring release from the torment of a life that has been a long disappointment, yet willing to fall into thine hand and know no will but thine. The poor, the desolate, the feeble, the infirm, the friendless—the Lord's blessing be upon them all, giving them warmth of heart and such renewal of hope as can find its satisfaction in Christ only. Be with those also who are separated from us by long distance: the Lord's merciful messages go out towards them, Sabbath gospels and benedictions—reminding them of this service, filling their souls with all gladness. The Lord's blessing be round about the whole globe like a living light; omit none from thy benediction; let the rudest, poorest, vilest, feel that the heavens are filled with the Father, and that the earth is his footstool.

Let thy word be amongst us to-day, a sweet message, a wind from heaven, a fire from above the fountains of the sun, a great joy, an ineffable rapture; yea, may it be all things beautiful, tender, and ennobling to our waiting souls. Amen.

MATTHEW ii. 1-10

1. Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (six Roman miles south-west of Jerusalem) of Judea (so called to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Galilee), in the days of Herod the King (the father of Herod Antipas and the grandfather of Herod Agrippa, before whose son Paul pleaded), behold there came wise men (Magians—Magicians) from the east (the *far* East, supposed by some to be Persians) to Jerusalem.

2. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews (not King of the Jews alone, but the king that springs from the Jews), for we have seen his star (an astrological mystery for which there is no modern interpretation) in the east, and are come (more than a four months' journey) to worship (to do homage to) him.

3. When Herod the king had heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet.

6. And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda ; for out of thee shalt come a governor that shall rule (literally shall conduct as a shepherd, ποιμαίνει) my people Israel.

7. Then Herod, when he had privily (secretly) called the wise men (for royalty must consult wisdom), inquired of them diligently (ascertained exactly) what time (having found out the *place* by another authority) the star appeared.

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem (from a metropolis to a village—the usual way !) and said, Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9. And when they had heard (equal to the Latin verb *audire*, which implies not only hearing but obedience) the king, they departed ; and lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

HERE would seem to begin the *inquiry* about Jesus Christ which has never since ceased to be the supreme question of the religious mind. That inquiry, I take it, is more eager and widespread to-day than ever it was in any period of human history. Still the great subject is—*where* is Christ, *who* is Christ, *what* is Christ? The books that reveal him most profoundly and lovingly to the human mind and heart are books which hold their own to-day amid the fiercest possible literary competition. All this means something. There is in it a deep and all but tragical mystery ; an agony of the heart speaks in this inquiry of the lips. The life of man wants something more than it has yet secured ; it tries to evade answers that bring with them severe moral obligations, and yet it recurs to those answers as if they were the only profound and vital replies. It is a great mystery, it is even a sharp pain, it is a dense cloud, and out of it there come, in strange and terrible gleamings, lightnings that might affright and destroy the mind that inquires and wonders.

The great inquiry related to that which was *essential* rather than to that which was *accidental*. Of course that which was accidental had to come into the inquiry. Certain things had been prophetically written, certain places and times had been specifically indicated, and therefore attention must be directed into those quarters. Still the grave and everlasting inquiry relates to that which is essential and immutable. The word upon which I would lay the strongest emphasis is the word *born*. Not upon the word *young*, not upon the word *child*. “Young” is a term that lives on for a few days, and then melts out of our sight and becomes a *age* whilst yet we admire its tender bloom. “Child” is a beautiful bud that bursts into a full flower whilst we are looking at it. But BORN is a historical word : it is the same always, it indicates the revelation of life, the setting up of new ministries and forces in the universe. To be young is to be a child, is to pass through very transitory stages and attractions ; but to be *born* sets up a fact, immortal as God. *We* have been born. Our youth has

gone like the mist of the morning, our childhood is a hardly remembered sun-spot in our recollection, but our birth hastens to shape itself into a permanent destiny. It is in this light I look upon your dear little children when you bring them to me to be baptized. I do not sneer at babyhood, nor do I say, how can the dear unconscious little infant understand this ordinance of baptism? *Life* is larger than understanding, life is grander than logic. Are we subjects for the vivisectioning instruments of the Aristotles of the ages? Are we not something infinitely and inexpressibly more? When you bring the child, you bring more than childhood, you bring *life*, and when I throw upon the dear little face the baptismal drops, I throw them not upon a creature six weeks old, but a creature *born*—a new creation, a beautiful presence in the universe, great enough for God to take an interest in, small enough for us to smile about, precious enough for Christ to die for.

This interest in childhood should teach us a great deal. Childhood in itself is little, but it is a quantity that is always growing. Let old Pharaoh teach us what to do with the children. He said, "These Israelites will be too many for us one day." What, then, did he propose in the view of their over-multiplication? To kill off all the men, or all the women? His was a profounder policy: I would God the Church could seize it and apply it to the current questions of our own economy. He said, "Kill the boys, drown them." Am I appalled by the idiot's philosophy? No; but I am struck by the wisdom that sees in *childhood*, boyhood, a growing power, and that directs its attention to the early life of nations, for they who begin with the adults begin at the wrong end, and they who begin with the little ones begin at the right point, and may achieve profound and permanent success. Do not sneer at the boys. Do not count them for nothing. They will be your successors, they may now be your scholars. For a time they may grieve you and annoy you, and, by an impertinence that is only for the passing day, they may again and again bring momentary annoyance or distress upon you; but it is a grand thing to have to do with them. Let your gentleness make them great. Show yourself so deeply interested in them, by many an inquiry, as to start in their minds the question whether they be not something greater and grander than they appear to be merely for the passing moment.

Pharaoh and Herod directed their attention to young life. If they could have gotten hold of the young life and turned it in their direction they might have built up very bad sovereignties, but it was one of two things with them, either the boys would overcome them or they must overcome the boys. Let me speak words of strong encouragement and genuine comfort to those of you who are young. You cannot tell what you may be yet. Work with a high aim, be moved to noble and pure ambitions. You will have your broad chance in the world. O may every finger you have,

and every faculty, be made keen enough and strong enough to seize the chance and turn it as it were into fine gold.

In reading this text one is struck with the power of one life to rouse a world. Observe who gather around this young child. Wise men from the east, kings, chief priests and scribes of the people, and elsewhere we hear of the interest of shepherds who were keeping their flocks by night. A strange thing for these old Persian astrologers to come four months from their homes to see one who was born—not king of the *Persians*, then their journey would have admitted an easy explication—but king of the *Jews*—why should those Oriental star-gazers be interested in Jewish history to this extent? There is more in the question than appears on the surface. This king of the Jews is not king of the Jews only, but he is the king who springs out of the Jews to be the king of all men. He will choose his own name presently. Our fathers called us what they pleased without consulting us: not a man was asked what name he would bear: his name is the finger-mark of a power he can neither understand nor resist, but there comes a time when every man may make himself a name, may by his spirit and his actions build up an appellation which will endure through all eternity. When Jesus Christ comes to speak of himself he will explain this Persian eagerness. He will call himself the Son of Man. He will broaden away from his birthpoint until he covers the whole area of human nature, answering every throbbing pain, anticipating every distressful prayer, and giving answers greater than any questions that ever could be framed.

Herein is the explanation of all kinds of people wanting to know about Jesus Christ. Philosophy calls in to see what he is. Kings pause a moment on their royal processions to ask questions about him, chief priests and scribes of the people betake themselves to literary research and religious investigation that they may be able to answer popular inquiries concerning this unnameable Man. And all kinds of poor people want to know where he is, that they may speak to him a prayer that has come back from every door, a bruised bird that could find no space for its flying. We have read in the seventy-second psalm of the first Solomon, type of a greater, who shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth—why? Heard ye the sweet answer? *For he shall deliver the poor and the needy and him that hath no helper.* This is not a painted majesty, a gilded dominion, a great comet-like blaze of transient splendour: it is a monarchy built on *beneficence*. He who makes it his supreme business in life to help the poor and the needy, the woman and the child, the far off and the destitute, the misunderstood and the friendless—nothing can hinder him putting on his head crown upon crown until other kings look petty beside his majesty.

It is thus that Jesus Christ will reign. Not by force of chariots and multitudinousness of horses, not by the grandeur of his earth-state, but by

that loving sympathy which understands everybody, by that infinite beneficence that stops not at donations of the hand but gives all the blood of its heart. Hereon ye may build the Christian argument, and naught will be able to overthrow it. They will be able to ask you difficult questions about miracles and mysteries of every kind, they will be able to puzzle you with grammatical inquiries, they may lose you altogether in historical and archæological investigations and references : your heads may become bewildered there—you stand to this grand sovereign fact, let *him* be king who can do most for men. Here you have the key which explains the in-rushing upon Christ of all the nations and climates of the world.

Yet one cannot but be struck with the different purposes of the inquiry. The Magians said, "We have come to worship him,"—literally to do homage to him. Trust the men who can do homage to anything, out of and greater than themselves. Always set a high price upon reverence. Veneration is the basis of all noble and tender and beneficent character. I would distrust the man who has proved himself destitute of veneration. It does us good to bend the knee to an object which we suppose to be greater than we are ourselves. We have all seen the poor superstitious creatures, as we deem them, on the continent of Europe, coming into the churches for a moment and bowing and genuflecting after a manner which we could not understand. I never could mock that service. I have thought I have seen upon the peasant's face a tenderer expression, a more glowing solemnity because of that little service in the house of God. There are men who are greater in blasphemy than in reverence, and the world over they never had anything good to say of men, and they never did anything for men worthy of a moment's remembrance. Why have we come into Christ's house this morning? If we have come to worship him, we shall retire from the house larger and better men : the small critical function with which we might have distressed ourselves in passing through the service will be suspended, and in our hearts there will glow a fire of new love. By so much as we have bent the knee lovingly and loyally to the Son of Man have we thrown off the worst part of ourselves, and taken upon us part of that which constitutes his beauty and strength.

Herod's purpose was not to worship him : he said it was to worship—he lied. Can men lie about religious things? Yes. Can men say *worship* when they mean *destroy*? They say it every day. Can men be found who will put up a church for Christ and yet not know what they are building? Alas, it is not only possible, it is the saddest fact of our business, that we build temples, and curse the stones as we put them together. We set up ministers, not with songs but sometimes with oaths. There is a possibility of destroying Christ, under the guise of worshipping him, and there is a further possibility of destroying Christ more or less unconsciously, by giving false notions of him, by making him a class-Redeemer, by

setting him apart for sectarian uses, by attaching to him badges and labels, scarves, and memorials, that make him belong to one corner only, by narrowing his words down into denominational shibboleths—by a thousand such ways we destroy Christ's influence in the world. Know ye that Christ is a Sun which cannot be touched, and also a light which plays with loving familiarity upon the one-paned cottage of the poor man and upon the stately palaces of royalty and wealth? He is a Sun not to be clipped by your instruments or rearranged by your eager fingers, and he is a light that will bless you, but must never be trifled with.

Then there are other men who do not come to worship Christ, and who certainly do not come to destroy him—who simply come to *speculate* upon him. They make him an intellectual puzzle. He is the mystery of the day to them, they must say something about him, he is an enigma they cannot afford wholly to ignore, and it is heart-breaking to hear the chaff they pour forth without one grain of wheat in the innumerable bushels. And sadder still to hear the *patronage* they offer the Son of God. Have you heard how they speak about him? With measured approbation, with a fine critical discrimination as to his properties, and qualities, and place in human history. It makes me sad to hear how they damn him with faint praise. They say he had upon him the inspiration of genius, they allow that he was an excellent character, perhaps a little too amiable now and then. He had wondrous prevision, he saw a great deal more than many of his contemporaries saw. He was a very excellent man in all his purposes; his motives were unquestionably good. If he is not more than that, he is the crowning hypocrisy of history. What I dread amongst you most is not that you will destroy Christ, but that you will patronise him. You who laid the hand upon the fat bullock and said "Good," will put the same paw upon the Son of God and say "Not bad." He will resist such patronage, and denounce it, and decline it, and return it to rest upon those who gave it. It will be a curse that they can never survive.

Jesus Christ is nothing to me if he is not the Saviour of the world. I never heard persons in moments of great agony or distress speak about the inspiration of genius being upon Christ. I have heard them say so when they were doing well: I have heard them speak thus about Christ when they were parenthetically interposing, "No more, thank you," about their fat dinner. But when I have seen them doubled up with great distress, and thrust into dark corners, and carrying burdens that break the back, and shuddering under clouds that may be laden with death darts, I have heard a whimper that would have disgraced a dog. You will know what Jesus Christ is most and best when you are in greatest need of such service as he can render.

You find, too, very different results flowing from these inquiries. Herod

was troubled, but the wise men rejoiced with exceeding great joy. This is a summary of to-day's experience. It is one of two things with this Christ in the life. He is either the source of your keenest troubles, or he is the beginning and the end of your supremest joys. The good always trouble the bad. The honest clerk troubles you who are not honest. You hate that young man : he is good to look upon, he is pleasant to speak to, he is most companionable, many an attraction attaches to his method and ways amongst men, but his honesty is a continual judgment upon your dishonesty. If you were to hear that he had dropped down dead, it would only be a hypocrite's sigh that would answer the announcement. It is a law of the universe, if we may judge by its being a law of society, that the bad are always troubled by the good, the generous giver is a daily trouble to the penurious man : he finds motives for his generosity, he attributes his liberality to false inspirations, he wonders he could not be more prudent, careful, and thoughtful : all the while in his heart he hates the man who by contrast throws him into very cold and distant shadow.

On the other hand, no man has given such joy to the world as Jesus Christ has given. He carries all his disciples up to the point of rapture. Such have been the feelings of Christian men that a new language has had to be invented for the expression of their lofty and sacred emotions. Religion, say you, has a cant of its own : it is only a cant to those who have not been fired to the same intensity of zeal, and brought to the same nobility of sacrificial temper. When the Christian man shouts, "Praise the Lord, Amen, Hallelujah," he utters a fool's language to those who have never been in his temper. It is a foreign tongue to them, which they can only answer by foolish mocking. But there are times in the religious experience when only such a word as Hallelujah—Hallelujah—a word not to be explained in smaller terms—expresses the dominant feeling of the excited and grateful soul.

Have you seen Christ's star in the east ? That is a sight which we may never behold ; but we may see a greater sight than that. We may see himself. It is only the accidental that drops off—such words as young, child, Bethlehem, star—fall away into their proper insignificance, but such words as born, King, Christ, Redeemer, sin, salvation—abide with a most indestructible permanence in human recollection. It will be a happy day when we are more eager to see Christ than we are to see any symbol of Him that could be found, either in the heavens or on the earth. I do not want you, as my fellow-students of this Word, to care about baptism and the Lord's supper, and the Sabbath-day, and the church built with hands—except as these may lead you further into the inner sanctuary where is enthroned Christ himself. If I found men now earnestly searching the heavens with the most scientifically constructed telescopes, that they might find a star resembling what the Persian sages saw, that they, too,

might follow its guiding light to some distant Bethlehem, I would say to them, "Christ is not here nor there : he is not to be found in sign or symbol now, except in some low and momentarily convenient sense. He himself is with us : he is to be found in our consciousness, he is to be the answer to our sin, he is to be the satisfaction of our hunger, he is to be the light of our intellectual firmament, he is to be the glory of our spiritual hope."

What, then, is our supreme anxiety to-day ? Is it to see the star or to see the Saviour ? Is it to make a prophetic calculation of years and months, or to go out of the heart searching for One who is the answer to sin and the balm for its cruel wounding ? If you say, "Sirs, I would see Jesus," you will find him in the Holy Scriptures, you will find him in every Christian's experience, in proportion as it is enlarged and true ; yea, you will find him in the very question itself, for no man ever asked that question with the sincerity and earnestness of fire, without the answer beginning the moment the question ended.

IV.

LIFE LARGER THAN LOGIC—THE HELPFULNESS OF SCIENCE—THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION—THE DIFFICULTY OF PATIENCE.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee through Jesus Christ our Lord, our Priest and Saviour. He is the Mediator between God and Man, he is the propitiation for our sins, his blood cleanseth from all guilt, he is our joy and our strength, and there is none beside him, our whole salvation, a redemption complete and infinite. We assemble to-day around his Cross, we touch the dying Lamb, we look first at our sin and then at his grace; where sin abounds grace doth much more abound, so that the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son is our answer to thy fierce law. We have no other reply, our hearts are silent when thy law accuses, but in Christ Jesus and his cross, and in all the wondrous work he did, we find our answer to the accusations of thy righteousness and all the challenges of thy law. We pray in his name; our intercessions are mighty because they are offered at his cross; they are weak and worthless in themselves, but because of what Jesus is and what Jesus did, all our weakness is turned into strength, and our trembling prayer becomes a prevalent intercession.

We have come to bless thee with a new song, for thy mercies have been renewed in our life day by day. Every hour has brought its own miracle of grace, every moment has seen some fresh display of thy patience or providential care. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. Thou hearest the throbbing of our heart, thou knowest the way that we take; yea, thou dost beset us behind and before, and upon us is laid thy gentle yet mighty hand. We are here because of thy goodness, thou hast saved our soul from death, we are yet on praying ground, we have the opportunity of uttering our psalm and hymn and prayer into Heaven in the name and for the sake of the one Saviour. Thou hast given us bread to eat, thou hast sheltered us from the darkness and the storm, thou hast given unto us rest in sleep, and the renewal of strength therein, thou hast continued unto us our reasoning faculties, the chain of our friendship has not been broken in one link—because, therefore, of all these thine earthly mercies, we bless thee with a rising gratitude, we praise thee with a full heart, for thy mercies have been many and tender.

Thou hast, above all things, nourished our soul. Though we were branches that had no place in the living stem, yet hast thou grafted us in, so that now we partake of the root and the fatness of the olive. Thou didst find us when we were lost, thou didst make us sons when we were aliens and wanderers, thou didst invest us with all the privileges of thy church when our arm had been lifted against thee in continual rebellion. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. May we enjoy all thy privileges now, may we seize our inheritance and claim it with our whole heart, so that we who were poor by reason of this world's sins and distresses may now become rich with imperishable wealth. To this end do thou pour upon us the Holy Ghost; may he dwell in us, ruling our thought and purpose and will, and

sanctifying us altogether, till there be in our whole nature nothing of impurity or wrong. Complete the miracle of thy grace in our sanctification ; may we be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, glorious personally, and glorious as a redeemed church.

We put our life into thy care day by day. We know not when its last breathings shall be ; help us, therefore, to be diligent with all care and filial anxiety to do that which is right in thy sight, and to make the most of our day and generation. Deliver us from the torment of fear, save us from the hell of despondency, create in us that happiness, that overflowing joyousness which comes of complete trust in God. May we not give way to the temptation of the evil one, may our fears never multiply themselves against us to the extinction of our hope, and in the darkest night may we see some distant and trembling star, in the coldest winter may there come upon us now and again some gleam of light that tells of the summer that is yet to dawn. In all the way that we take give us guidance, ensure unto us defence, then shall our steps be steady, and they shall all point towards the city of light and the city of rest.

Thou knowest what we need : grant unto us, we humbly pray thee, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, that which our heart most truly requires. Wherein our words do not express our needs, do thou not hear those words nor answer them : wherein we are inspired to speak of our real and vital wants, do thou command thy blessing to rest upon us, even life for evermore. Pity us when we are infirm and little in soul and in purpose, save us when we are most conscious of our aggravated guilt, fill our vision with thy beauty when that which is of the earth and time would tempt us with its meaner attractions.

Hear us when we pray one for another, when we pray for heads of houses that they may be clothed with wisdom, sobriety, and grace, for children, that they may be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, for masters and servants, that they may understand and help one another, for the sick and the afflicted, that in their weakness they may see the incoming of Christ, bringing with him health and immortality, for the distant and the wandering, those from whom we are for the moment separated, that there may be no division of soul or distraction of love, but that though far apart, we may yet be one in affection and godly desire.

The Lord hear us on account of those who never pray for themselves, those who are aliens and prodigals, who have broken every vow, dishonoured every covenant, and have gone far away into the bleak wilderness of iniquity—the Lord's Gospel flee after them like a saving angel, and flash upon them some home-light or strike in their hearts some tender chord that shall bring them back again, that there may be rejoicing on earth and in Heaven. The Lord's light make our morning glad, the beauty of the Lord himself be upon us, making our souls lovely with his presence and strong with his grace. Amen.

MATTHEW ii. 11-15.

11. And when they were come into the house they saw the young child (the child first, not the mother : this order should be marked) with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him (a word often used in a double sense ; Xenophon says that Cyrus was *worshipped* by his subjects) ; and when they had opened their treasures (caskets or packages), they presented (according to oriental custom) unto him gifts : gold and frankincense, and myrrh (Psalm xlv. 8, lxxii. 15 ; Isa. lx. 6).

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13. And when they were departed, behold, the (an) angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee

into Egypt (the nearest asylum), and be thou there until I bring thee word : for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother (this order is unnatural, if not inspired) by night, and departed into Egypt ;

15. And was there until the death of Herod : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet (of Israel, but typically of Christ), saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

“THEY found the young child with Mary, his mother.” Surely this is an inversion of the right method of stating the case, judged by our little rules, pedantic and inadequate. A critic might here interpose and say, You have adopted the wrong order of sequence, you have inverted the proper method of statement. Instead of saying, Mary, the mother, and the young child, you have actually put the young child first, and thus you have inverted the order of time. Nor is this a slip, for I find the angel of the Lord adopting the same sequence in the 13th verse, saying to Joseph in a dream, “Take the young child with his mother,” and afterwards in the 20th verse, the angel again says, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother,” and in the 21st verse, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother.” The frequency of the repetition shows us that to indicate the young child first and the mother afterwards was not a literary slip.

When will we learn that life is larger than logic ? When will we keep our little technical rules away from great providences and mysteries ? We are ruined herein by our own exactness. The literalist can never be right in anything that challenges the highest efforts of the mind. He who is right in the mere order of words, after a pedantic law of rightness and accuracy, often misses the genius, the poetry, the overflowing and ineffable life of things. He boasts of his exactitude, he is very clever in defending himself against etymological and critical assaults, but he is vitally wrong. Within the limits which he has assigned for the movement of his powers he is right, but those *limits* themselves are wrong, and, therefore, it is possible to be partially right and yet to be substantially and vitally in error. He, for example, who says the earth stands still, is in a popular sense right, and yet his statement is absolutely wrong.

If we could apply this great thought of the largeness of life to the interpretation of Scripture, we should not be fretted by many of those petty and distracting criticisms which bring down heaven to the scale of earth, and vex us with unworthy controversies. The rule is, Christ *first*—the young child mentioned at the top of every list. “He was before all things and by him all things consist.” If he is Alpha, he is Omega ; if he is the young child, he is the Ancient of Days. He takes precedence of the whole universe, for he was before it—he laid its foundations, and arched its canopies. Refrain, therefore, from thy little and dwarfing criticisms ~~as~~ to

chronological sequence, and abandon those neat exactitudes which, by their very superficial claim to being considered right, may prevent the entrance into thy mind of the larger light and the broader revelation.

When the wise men came into the house they fell down and *worshipped* the young child. They did not fall down and worship Mary—they hardly saw the mother. Who can see anything but Christ when he is there? To see anything in God's house but God is to waste the opportunity. The wise men worshipped the young child, they did him homage, they bent before him, they became oblivious of themselves in his presence; not a word might they say, for worship when deepest is often silent. Words have been hindrances in the way of spiritual progress. Words are to blame for the thousand controversies that afflict and distress the Church. I would to God we could do without words, for who can understand even his friend? Who can catch the subtle emphasis, who has eyes quickened to see the colouring of the word, and sagacity to set it in its right place, so as to lose nothing of its rhythm, and harmony, and sweet intent? Whatever the word worship may mean here, religiously—for that word is used ambiguously both in the classics and in Scripture—it is evident that the wise men offered homage to the young child. The right attitude of wisdom is to bend before Christ, to be silent in his presence, to wait for him to lead the conversation. If wisdom venture to utter its voice first, it ought to be in inquiry or in praise. Wisdom is always reticent of speech; it is the fool who chatters, the wise man thinks. When Socrates was told that he was the wisest man in the world, he ran away, and yet returned to accept the compliment, for, said he, "I knew that I knew nothing, and I have met with no other man so wise."

If we come into the house where Jesus Christ is, our business is to imitate the wise men who came from the far east, namely, to bend the knee, to put our hand over our eyes, lest we be blinded by the great light, to be silent, to wait. It would be well, if in our brief time of worship we could set aside a few minutes for absolute silence. No minister to speak, no organ to utter its voice, no hymn to trouble the air. If we could, with shut eyes and bent head, spend five minutes in absolute speechlessness, that would be prayer, that would be worship. The fool would misunderstand it, and think nothing was being done, but as the last expression of velocity is rest, so the last expression of eloquence is silence, and sometimes the highest liturgy is to be dumb. We have banished the angel of silence, the angel of quietude is a nuisance to our fussy civilization; we have set noise in the front, and silence has been exiled from the Church.

Not only did the wise men worship Christ, they presented unto him *gifts*, "gold and frankincense and myrrh." This is the method of love. Worship is *giving*, it is not receiving. We are never to see Christ without giving him *ourselves*. Jesus Christ does not seek the homage of a courteous

recognition, he seeks the loyalty of absolute *sacrifice*. The wise men gave him all they had, and Jesus Christ never says, "Hold, you have given enough." Never, till the heart's last fibre is given to him, and the last red blood-drop falls upon his hand—then, having received us in the totality of our being, his soul is satisfied.

"And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way." God is in continual communication with the right-minded. He speaks to them by starry eloquence. He speaks to them in words and visions and dreams. He is a God nigh at hand, and not afar off to all those who are rightly disposed towards him, and whose hearts rise up in vehement desire to know his will. He will be as near us as our desire is pure: the fire of our earnestness will be, as it were, the measure of his readiness to come and give us guidance and defence. He spake to the wise men in a dream. We have debased the word dream, and then we ask one another with a hilarious scepticism if we believe in *dreams*? What word have we not fouled and despoiled, and then, having brought it to its smallest significations, we have turned round and asked if we believe that such terms can be measured by divine revelations? By overfeeding, we have brought upon ourselves all the distresses of dyspeptic nightmare, and having come out of the nightly struggle, we say, "Now do you suppose that there is any truth in *dreams*?" See how the argument is put upon a false centre, see how we first *waste* the inheritance, and then demand its *value*?

What does the word dream signify? Not a nightmare, not the incoherences and ravings of a disordered brain, resulting from overfeeding. It means the outgo of the soul towards the invisible, distant, spiritual, incomprehensible, eternal. We have lost the dream out of the Church. We have lost *everything*—prophecy, tongues, miracles, songs, gifts of healing, helps, governments, enthusiasms, heroisms—we have lost them all! It is just like us—fools, we ought never to have been trusted with anything! What have we left now? Nothing. Miracles gone, prophecy gone, the devil gone, God—GOING. As for dreams, we have long survived their foolish means of communicating with the invisible. As for dreams, we despise them, and laugh mockingly over our smoking chocolate, and ask one another if we believe in *dreams*! Reclaim the original signification of the term, rebuild the shattered inheritance, and then ask the great question, and you shall have a great reply.

The dream stands for that grandest of all powers, the religious imagination. That, again, is a word which must be used with great guardedness, because the word imagination has itself been stripped, wounded, and left half-dead. Who can now define imagination with the original fire and with the original grandeur? We abuse and misapply the terms. We now say, speaking of a man who makes false suppositions, "He *imagines* things."

When we so use the word, we use it with improper limitations, and in short we give a wrong turn to the term. No wonder, therefore, that we are afraid to use the grand word imagination in any religious sense. It is only a man in a century or two who is really gifted with imagination. Imagination is a *creative* faculty, imagination *images* the unimagined, gives visibility and palpableness to the immaterial, the unmeasured and the unnamed.

When we charge certain persons with having no imagination, they start and say, "If we have one faculty more than another, it is imagination." When we ask them to provide the proof, what do they reply? They mistake description for imagination; thus, they will describe an object as blue on one side and yellow on the other and surmounted by a coronal of red, and then they will claim for their speech the sublime epithet of imagination! It is a house painter's imagination. It is the imagination of a man who paints rustic signs for rustic inns. Imagination!—it is God's supreme gift to the human mind. When a thought presents itself to the intelligence, imagination *bodies* it, gives it form, configuration, colour, and enters into high dialogue with the strange and most wondrous guest. The most of us have no imagination; the next best gift we can have is to listen with patience rising into delight, to the man to whom God has given this great gift of making the dumb speak, and calling into visibleness the unseen and unpalpable.

The wise men "departed into their country another way." God knows the way into your countries and kingdoms, how distant soever they be. You have made a high road out of your Persia into the distant Judea, how will you get back again? Why, by the same road—there is no other, say you, in conscious wisdom concerning the whole topographical arrangement. The angel of the Lord says, "I will show you the way home: not one step of the old road shall you take, I will make a way for you." Do not say there is no way out of your difficulty. It is a family difficulty, or a difficulty imperial or ecclesiastical, or a difficulty upon which you can take no human counsel. Do not, therefore, say that your way is passed over from your God, that you have been brought into a *cul de sac*, and must bruise your head against the resisting and defiant walls. Stand still, and say, "Lord, show me thy salvation: take me home by another way: I thought this was the right road, I find that my thinking has been misinformed, or that circumstances have arisen which throw my calculations into preplexity and environ my life with strange and mighty opposition. Lord, I will not move one inch until thou dost lead the way." Say you so—is that your heart's sweet litany? No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper. Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass. Oh, rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, and he shall give thee thy heart's desire.

This incident shows us in how many ways God interposes in human af-

fairs. The angel of the Lord *warned* the wise men, and he also warned Joseph. There is a ministry of warning in our life. Why that sudden start? You cannot explain it. It was a frightening angel that looked upon your life for a moment, and by his look said, "Not this way—straight on." Why tear up the programme on which you have spent months? You cannot explain why, but a voice said to you, "That programme is all wrong, tear it to pieces and throw it into the fire: there is danger there. Beware, take care. Not this road. Trust not to thine own understanding. That programme is a witness to thy folly and shallowness: throw it from thee as thou wouldst throw poison, and stand empty-handed before God, and ask him to write the way-bill." "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Lean not to thine own understanding."

Sometimes God sends warnings to us in extraordinary ways by extraordinary people and under improbable circumstances. I am conscious of the presence of this warning ministry in my life, though I have no words subtle and keen enough wherewith to express all that I feel on that solemn subject. Shall I shake hands with yonder man? I think I will; he looks healthy, he looks kind, and yet in the midst of all these hopeful lucubrations, my hand takes sudden palsy and I will not shake hands with him, and cannot. How so? There is a warning angel in my life. I, poor unsuspecting fool, would shake hands with every man who smiles upon me, for I have no eye for the detection of the villain's cheek, but the warning angel says, "Take care, go aside, he is a goodly apple—rotten at the core."

Not only is there a warning ministry in this incident, there is also a *watching* ministry. The angel of the Lord watched Herod, watched the young child and his mother, watched the wise men. O those watchers that fill the air—your mother, your child, your friend, your guardian angel—every one of us has an angel-self to be seen only with the eyes of the soul's inspired imagination. They watch us night and day. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation?" I am alone, yet I am not alone, for God's angel is with me. Do not live a little fleshly life, do not shut yourself up within the limits of your constabulary arrangements and imagine that no eye is upon you but the eye of detective and suspicious law. Love watches, redemption, embodied in Jesus Christ, watches, we are beset behind and before, and there is a hand upon us, and a kind eye is behind the cloud, looking now and again upon our life, and flashing a tender morning ray upon our long-bound and darkness-wearied souls.

Learn from the next passage in the incident, that man's simple business in perplexity is to *obey*. "Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt." Obedience sometimes requires *activity*. The angel said, "Arise and flee." That is the easiest part

of obedience. There is no difficulty about fleeing, about exerting oneself; the blood heats, and activity is delight. God puts these calls to activity into our life at the right times and with the right measure of appointment. Why, you say, you would have died on the dear friend's coffin, but that you were obliged to arouse yourself to attend to the last obsequies. Kind is the way of God even in these matters. When death darkens your window and turns your day into night it always says to you, "Arise and flee, work, arrange, settle," and one of the first things you have to do in the midst of your intolerable agony is to bestir yourself. In that bestirring there is sometimes salvation.

After activity comes *patience*. The angel said, "And be thou there until I bring thee word." That is the *hard* part of life. Whilst I am climbing the mountains, passing through the wildernesses, daring dangers, I feel comparatively quiet, or even glad. But to sit down when the angel tells me to sit, and not to stir till he comes back again—who can do it? I inquire of the first man who comes near me, whether I cannot get away out of Egypt? He says he thinks I can if I try the next turn, and I, disobedient soul, move towards the next turn, and if a wolf sent of God did not show its gleaming teeth at me there, I would be off, so fond am I of activity and self-direction, and so impossible is it to me to sit still and see the outworking of the divine will.

The true interpretation of human purposes is from God. Herod said, "I will worship him, when you bring me word." The angel said, "Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." Herod said *worship*—Herod meant *destroy*. The angel knows our meaning: God does not take our words always in the sense in which we offer them. He reads between the lines. He peruses the small print of the motive and of the inward and half-revealed or even half-formed desire. He shows us to ourselves. Sometimes when we say *worship*, he shows us by an analysis of our own acceptance of the term, that *destroy* is the proper meaning of our language. Lord, interpret my speech to me: I use words of false meaning, I think sometimes I mean to be religious—show me that some religions are lies, and that some prayers are offences. Save me from being my own lexicographer: when I write a word, do thou, gentle Father, ever wise, write after it its true and proper meaning.

The young child, Mary and Joseph, are now at this point of the incident, away in Egypt. There are times of *retreat* in every great life, times when Christ must be driven into Egypt, when the prophet must be banished into solitude, when John the Baptist must be in the desert eating locusts and wild honey, when Saul of Tarsus must be driven off into Arabia—times when we are not to be found. An asylum need not be a tomb, retreat need not be extinction. For a time you are driven away—make the best of your leisure. You want to be at the front, instead of that you have been

banished to the rear : it is for a wise purpose. Gather strength, let the brain sleep, yield yourself to the spirit of the quietness of God, and after what appears to be wasted time or unprofitable waiting, there shall come an inspiration into thy soul that shall make thee strong and fearless, and the banished one shall become the centre of nations.

V.

SECOND CAUSES NOT SUFFICIENT—PHYSICAL FORCE WEAKER THAN MORAL
—ANGEL MINISTRIES—AFRAID OF WHOLE FAMILIES—GOODNESS CANNOT
DIE.

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy way is very wonderful, and we cannot find it out ; thou dost justify thyself in righteousness and in mercy, notwithstanding our sore perplexity and the vexation of our soul in time of trouble. Thou dost send men on strange errands, thy requests are bold ; thou dost lay thine hand upon our life, and require it as our gift. Who can restrain thee ? Who can mitigate thy severity ? Who can answer thy great thunder ? What sword have we that can reply to thy lightning ? Teach us that our place is to obey, to receive the will from heaven, and with all patience and loving industry to do it every whit. How can we do so ? We are of yesterday, and know nothing ; we mistake the near for the precious and the great ; we do not allow for distance and colour in the proportion of things, so we are constantly mistaking that which is in our hand as being greater and better than that which is afar off. We consult impatient temper ; we are the slaves of an imperfect and depraved will ; a thousand mean and treacherous appetites besiege the very centre and source of our best life—how then can we obey ? This is of the Lord's doing : we are saved by grace and not by work ; this is not an offering of our own ; it is the outworking of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. We do not marvel now that we must be born again ; we bless thee for this gospel of regeneration, which is the gospel of the heart of thy Son, for the laver of regeneration is filled with nothing less than the blood of the heart of Christ. To no baptismal water do we come, but to a laver and fountain of regenerating blood. The blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. We would test its power ; we would see our sin cleansed by its efficacy ; we are weary of sin : it tires those whom for a moment it pleases—the fire of wickedness goes out and leaves a death-like cold behind it. We would therefore turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart ; we would live in the Lord, for the Lord would we live, our delight would be in thy testimonies, and our satisfaction in thy service.

Thou hast appointed unto us but a few days wherein to live. Our life is as a dying smoke, or as a wind that flieth speedily away and which none can find. We are like water spilled upon the ground which cannot be gathered up. Few and evil are the days of thy servants ; our life is but a span ; we see the meanness of its duration and the poverty of its own resources, yet are we enslaved by fascinations which throw their spell upon us every day. We would that God would deliver us from all these bondages, and cause us to enter into the wide and glorious liberty of his Son. That we should ever have prayed this prayer is the miracle of our life, for we were dead in trespasses and sin, and our soul's delight was in the gardens forbidden, and in the trees that are interdicted, but now we are alive in Christ, and our soul's desire is to

drink of the living stream, to pluck of the tree of life, and to do God's will with hearty sincerity, with humble devoutness, with reverence that itself is worship.

Appoint unto us our task and give us strength to fulfil it all. When the burden is very heavy, do not lessen the load, but increase the strength. When the hill is very high and the wind is very bleak, and we are ill able to bear it, reduce nothing of the severity of the discipline, but increase in us that loving patience, that high hope, that gentle trust, which accepts everything at thine hand as right and wise and good.

Thou art teaching us many lessons difficult to learn, hard to apply, yet which in the application turn to sweet gospels, even to resurrections and great deliverances. Thou dost take away the pride of our life, the delight of our eyes, the song of our souls. Thou dost make us poor indeed: thou sendest a bitter cold upon us, under which we shiver and tremble with agony: thou dost distress us by many troubles, thou wilt not allow us to keep the dear child—it is plucked like an unopened bud. When thou dost see us in the midst of our joy thou dost trouble our cup with bitterness—as for our fig tree, thou dost bark it and leave it naked—as for our one lamb, its loneliness is no protection against thy judgment; thou dost take it away in the night time, and in the morning we are visited with infinite distress.

This is the life we live: we sing and curse and mourn and reproach, and there is no prayer found upon our lips, yet dost thou send unto us messages from heaven, yea, last of all thou didst send thy Son, and he gave himself for us. We have been touched by the pathos of the cross, we have been moved by the entreaties of the dying Christ, we have found in him our one and only priest—now we would live in him, and for him and to him, and would be bound to his kingdom as willing and loving slaves. Amen.

MATTHEW ii. 16-23.

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men (mocked of God, rather) was exceeding wroth, and sent forth (murderers), and slew all the children* that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts (suburbs or precincts) thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18. In Rama (which lay on the way to Babylon) was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel (the progenetrix of Israel) weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19. But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.

20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel (the *country* is divinely named; the particular *town* was humanly selected);

* “The number of those slaughtered on this occasion has been erroneously thought to be great, and the deed itself a horrible massacre, whereas, in the nature of things, there could be but a few children under two years in a little town like Bethlehem, and these might be put out of the way without any stir.”—*Olshausen*. With regard to the silence of Josephus respecting this massacre, Bishop Ellicott says:—“What, we may fairly ask, was such an act in the history of a monster whose hand reeked with the blood of whole families and of his nearest and dearest relations? What was the murder of a few children of Bethlehem in the dark history of one who had, perchance, but a few days before burnt alive at Jerusalem above forty hapless zealots who had torn down his golden eagle? What was the lamentation at Rama compared with that which had been heard in that monster's own palace, and which, if his inhuman orders had been executed, would have been soon heard in every street in Jerusalem?”—*Hulsean Lecture*, 1859.

for they are dead which sought the young child's life (literally the young child's *soul*).

21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign (under the inferior title of Ethnarch) in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene (mean and contemptible, so the root of the word signifies.)

“THEN Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men”—yet the wise men did not mock him at all! When will people get away from the region of secondary causes, and understand that life has a divine centre, and that all things are governed from the throne of heaven? It is not only a philosophical mistake to drop into second causes for the purpose of finding the origin of our miseries, it sometimes, yea often, becomes a practical mischief, a sore and terrible disaster of a personal and social kind. Therefore with great urgency would I drive men away from secondary lines and intermediate causes, to the great cause of all—God, and King, and Lord, and Christ. Herod was mocked of *God*: he was not mocked of the Persian sages: they were not unwilling to ally themselves with him, so far as they were personally concerned, if they could contribute aught to his intelligence or to the carrying out of his expressed purpose to “worship” the Child of whom they themselves were in quest. Herod was mocked, vexed from heaven, troubled from the centre of things. The fog that fell upon his eyes came downwards, not upwards, it was a blinding mist from him who sends upon men delusions as well as revelations.

We have ourselves been mocked of God, and we have taken vengeance upon human instrumentalities. If we insist upon having our own way, there is a point at which God says, “Take it, and with it take the consequences.” If we resolutely and impatiently say, “We will find success along this line and no other,” God may say to us, “Proceed, and find what you can.” And at the end of that line, what have we found? A great rock, a thousand feet thick, and God has said, “You may find success if you will thrust your hand through that granite.” So we have been mocked. We have determined to proceed along a certain course, notwithstanding the expostulations of heaven, and having gone mile after mile, what have we found at the end of the course? A great furnace, and God has said to us with mocking laughter, that hast shaken the skies, “Your success is in the middle of that furnace: put your hand right into the centre and take it,”—knowing that he who puts his hand in there takes it out no more.

In proportion, therefore, as we are mocked and vexed, as we come back

from the wilderness, bringing with us nothing but the wind, as we return from the mountains bringing with us nothing but a sense of perplexity, it becomes us to ask serious questions about our failure. *Who* mocked us? Not men, not women—we were laughed at from heaven. There is no passage of Scripture which has upon me so weird an effect as that which says that God will mock at our calamity, and laugh when our fear cometh. We have seen his tears—they baptized Jerusalem, they have fallen in gracious showers upon the graves that hold our heart's treasure, but we have never heard his *laugh*. There is a human laughter that turns us cold—God forbid that we should ever hear our divine Father's laughter, when the great fire-waves swell around us and all heaven seems to be pleased with the discomfiture of our souls.

When Herod saw that he was mocked of the wise men, what did he? Let us suppose that the passage is interrupted at that point and that we are required to continue the story. Now let us set our wits to work to complete the sentence which begins with "When Herod saw that he was mocked of the wise men." Let me suggest this continuation—He saw a *religious mystery* in this matter: he said, "This is not the doing of the wise men, there is a secret above and behind and around this, which I have not yet penetrated: I am troubled, but it is with religious perplexity. I will fall down upon my knees, I will outstretch mine arms in prayer, and will cry mightily to God to visit me in this crisis of my intellectual distress and moral consternation." Let me now turn and see how far my conjecture is right. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew." The power of wickedness is *physical*, the power of goodness is *moral*. Wickedness says, "A sword;" goodness says, "A pen."

We know that this narrative is true in the case of Herod, because it is made true every day *in our own experience*. When we are vexed and mocked and disappointed, we do exactly what Herod did—we grow exceeding wroth, and slay. You need not consult the ancient historians to know whether Herod really did this work or not, when we ourselves are doing it every day of our vexation and disappointment. We all play the fool under such visitations. Not unless we are regenerated by God the Holy Ghost and cleansed through and through by the atoning blood do we rise to the high dignity and grandeur of moral dominion and spiritual conquest.

There are two victories possible to us, the one is physical, the other is a moral. I want this child to attend public worship. I say to the child, "You *must*: if you refuse I will *scourge* you until you go to church. I am older, I am stronger than you are, and you shall feel the supremacy of my age and the oppressiveness of my strength. To church I will *make* you go." I have succeeded, the child is in the church to-day. The child

is here, but NOT here. By a perverse will the child is turning this church into a desecrated place. The child's *will* is not here, nor is the child's *love* present with us : our prayers have been burdensome, and God's own word has lost its music, because of the constraint under which that attendance has been enforced.

Let me take the case of the child from another point. I have been dwelling upon the advantages of going to church : I have been speaking about God and God's love, Christ and Christ's cross, about the tender music and the beautiful word and the loving gospel, and I have said to the child, "I should like you to go : it would make my heart glad if you did go—I only *ask* you, I do not *force* you." And the child has said, "Certainly I will go ; show me the way, I should be *glad* to go." The child is here, every blood-drop in his heart is here, his eyes are rounding into a great wonder, and his breast heaving with an unusual but most glad emotion. Which is the conquest ? The conquests of force exhaust themselves and perish in ignominious failure, the conquests of love grow and increase with the processes of time.

When Herod saw that he was mocked of the wise men, he was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem. The power of badness is *destructive*, the power of goodness is *preservative*. We need direction in the quality and uses of strength. It is easy to destroy : even a beast can crush a flower, but no angel in all the heavens can reset the broken joint. We mistake destructiveness as a sign of power. What power there is in the act of destructiveness is of the lowest and coarsest quality. You cannot drive evil out of men by any merely negative and destructive process. If you call out "Repent," you must immediately follow the word with "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The call to repentance is in a sense a negative call, the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at hand is the positive and affirmative call, which tends to the upfilling of the emptied heart with the better dominion, the sanctuary from heaven. You may cut down all the weeds in your garden, but if you do not attend to that garden, putting in the place of that which was noxious that which is useful, the old roots will re-assert themselves and your garden will become a scene of confusion. Jesus does not destroy without creating. If we suppress anything we do not believe in, we ought to set up in its place influences of a higher and nobler kind. It is no use for you, my friends, to empty the public-house unless you open some other place that shall attract within its better limits those whom you have expelled. It is of no use for you to drive the devil out of a man unless you have something to put into the man. That devil will wander about and will return and bring with him seven worse than himself, and the end of the man will be worse than the beginning.

"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, say-

ing, In Rama was there a voice heard, mourning, lamentation, weeping," distress night and day, the cry of pain and the moan of agony. The result of selfishness is human distress, the result of goodness is good-will towards men. See then what the world would come to under a selfish rulership. Selfish rulership says, "If I cannot have my own way easily, I will have it at all costs and hazards." Selfish rulership lifts up its sword and says, "Make way." Selfish rulership will purchase its own ends at any cost of mourning, lamentation, and weeping. Thus the bad man seems to succeed more than the good man; his way is rougher, his manners are ruder, he destroys, he does not create, and it is always easier to pull down than to build up. Jesus Christ proceeds slowly because of the depth and vitality and permanence of his work. It is easier to curse than to pray. Under Herod the world would become a scene of selfish triumph; under Christ it would become a family united by tenderest bonds, made holy by mutual and sympathetic love, and sacred by the exercise of those obligations which elevate and ennoble human nature. I ask you, therefore, to-day, as the end of this part of the exposition—who is to be king, Herod or Christ, violence or persuasion, force or love, selfishness or beneficence? The choice is sharp, the division is distinct: he who would seek to muddle and confuse these distinctions, is not the friend of progress, he is the victim of a mischievous pedantry. The world can only be under one of two kings, God—mammon, Christ—Herod, beneficence—selfishness. Choose ye; put high his banner over your life and let it float so that men can see it from afar.

In the next paragraph of our text we find the appearance of an angel of the Lord in a dream. The angels are ever mindful of the good. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation?" You say you have had no experience of angel ministry: be careful what you say, lest you narrow yourselves unduly by the mere letter, and miss the poetry and grandeur of your life. You say you are bound by things visible and palpable, and beyond those things do not venture to go. I am not asking you to venture to go any distance beyond those limitations, but I am asking you to allow God the power to come to you by any one of a series of innumerable ministries. You must not "limit the Holy One of Israel." The question is not, What can *I* do? It is, What can *God* do?

I could imagine a little boy with his arithmetic saying that all things that could be reckoned up, in space and in quantity, were reckonable upon the basis of his book of figures. He begins and ends with the multiplication table; he says the multiplication table ends at twelve times twelve, and beyond that he will never go. He is not going to be wise above what is written: if any man should venture to ask him how many are thirteen times thirteen, he would shudder with arithmetical aversion, and reply that thirteen times thirteen was not to be found in the multiplication table.

Would he be *right*? He would be as far *wrong* as possible! Thirteen times thirteen is as certainly in the multiplication table as twice one or five times five. He will find that out by-and-by. He thinks he is keeping himself within due limits and must not transgress certain boundaries, when he says the table ends at twelve times twelve. He is going to be arithmetically orthodox: other people may dream about thirteen times thirteen if they please, he thinks that inquiry involves a very grave responsibility: he shrinks from their society, and he betakes himself with renewed ardour to the four corners of the table that begins at twice one and ends at twelve times twelve. Is he arithmetically pious and arithmetically orthodox? He is arithmetically narrow and arithmetically bigoted and arithmetically foolish!

By-and-by he will advance further. I will say to him, "What is the square root of five-and-twenty?" And he will say, "Anybody knows that the square root of five-and-twenty is five." "What is the square root of *minus a*?" "Ah, I do not go into that sort of thing at all." "But there is a science which tackles questions of *that* kind." The boy replies, "I know nothing about it; I do not want to be wise above that which is written. I can give you the square root of one hundred in a moment, but the square root of *minus a*—he must be a very presumptuous and arrogant person to discuss such a question! If it be not presumptuous, which it appears to me to be, it is exceedingly foolish." He lives within his arithmetic, he does not know that there is another science just over it, which undertakes to find out sums by signs, and to discuss deep problems by letters and symbols that appear to be foolish to those who have never entered their higher education.

When I come to these angel ministries, they baffle me. I say, "They are not in my arithmetic, they are not in the multiplication table." Let me never forget that algebra continues and perfects common arithmetic, and let me never forget that even beyond algebra itself are methods of calculation unknown to those who are in the lower ranges of human thought. I must not set up *myself* as the measure and bound of things. If the Bible comes to me with angel ministries, with assurances of what has been done by angels and through the medium of dreams, by high efforts of the religious imagination, I must not play the boy-fool by saying that reckoning ends with twelve times twelve; I must remember that the universe is larger than I have yet imagined it to be, and that there are men who are older and wiser, and it is not for me to say God's ministry begins here and ends there. I love to live in an enlarging universe, I love the horizon which tempts me to touch it, and then vanishes to an infinite distance.

The angel of the Lord said, "They are dead which sought the young child's life." The good have everything to hope from *time*, the bad have everything to fear from it.

The bad man is in haste, the good man rests in the Lord and waits patiently for him. The bad man says, "It must be done now ; my motto is '*ad rem*,'—now or never, strike the iron while it is hot, let passion have its way instantaneously." They that believe do not make haste, they are calm with the peace of God ; they trust to time ; they say, "All things will be fulfilled in the order of duration and the process of the suns." Innocence can wait ; innocence can go into any land and tarry there until sent for by the angel ; innocence can go into any prison and wait, not till helped by a butler, but until sent for by the king. If thou art innocent, be quiet ; if thou art really good at the core, through and through, simple-minded, honest in motive, pure in purpose, high and sacred in ambition, wait ; thy funeral will not be first.

Yet another fear fell upon the mind of Joseph. When he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea, under the inferior title of Ethnarch, in the room of his father Herod, he was "afraid to go thither." There are some families of which we are afraid : there are whole generations that seem to be blighted with a common taint. There are some chains whose links are all bad. Joseph thought that Archelaus might inherit the prejudices and hostilities of his father. There was no need for him to do so. Thank God, a man may break away from his own family, a child may be a stranger to his own father. Thank God for these possibilities of beginning again. I see what is called *fate* in the order and destiny of men : I have taken hold of the chain and find it to be thick and strong—yet I see also the wonderful *liberties* of men, so that they can detach themselves from a melancholy and shameful past on the part of others and begin again, by themselves, under God's blessing and direction, for themselves. Was your *father* a bad man ? You may be a good *son*. Fear not, do not droop under the blighting cloud. If it be in your heart to be better and you mention this purpose in prayer to God, your father's name shall rot, and yours shall be a memorial of goodness and hope, long as the sun endures.

They are DEAD which sought the young child's life. That is always the ending of wickedness : that is the history of all the assaults that ever have been made upon Jesus Christ and his kingdom. I have seen great armies of men come up against the young child, and behold they have perished in a night, and in the morning the angels have said to one another, "They are DEAD which sought the young child's life." I have seen armies of infidel books come up to put down Christianity, to expose it, and refute it and cut it to pieces, and destroy it as Herod's sword the children of Bethlehem, and lo, in twelve months not one of them could be found, and the angels have said to one another, "They are DEAD which sought the young child's life." I have seen critics come up with keen eye and sharp knife, and a new apparatus adapted to carry out its processes and purposes of extermination, and behold the critics have cut their own

bones and died of their own wounds, and the angels have said, "They are DEAD that sought the young child's life." I have seen whole towns of new institutions, created for the purpose of putting down the Christian Church. All kinds of competitive buildings have been put up at a lavish expenditure, the preacher was to be put down, the Bible was to be shut up, the old hymn-singing was to be done away with, a new era was to dawn upon the wilderness of time, and lo, the bankruptcy court had to be enlarged to take in groups of new mendicants, for they DIED that sought the young child's life!

No man ever died who sought the young child's saving ministry; no man ever died who went to the young child and said, "My Saviour, thy grace is greater than my sin, pity me and lift me out of this deep pit by the hand of thy love." The angels never said about such a one, "He is dead who offered that prayer." No dead man is found at the foot of the cross, they live who touch that tree, they are immortal who open their hearts to receive that baptism of blood, they are a triumphant host that take hold of hands around the young child.

He is always young: he is always in bloom. Time cannot wither him: as for custom it cannot "stale the infinite variety" of his ministry and his worship. God delights in youth: there is no wearying in the duration of goodness—wickedness runs down into exhaustion, goodness runs up into renewal of efflorescence and beauty, and eternal spring.

VI.

REVIEW OF THE SECOND CHAPTER—THE TROUBLED KING—THE BENEFICENCE OF TRIALS—THE SCRIPTURES ALWAYS NEW.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee as a God of Love, and it is to thy pity that we now come with our praises and our prayer. We do not address thy righteousness, for thy purity makes us afraid with a great and painful fear: we come to thy mercy—thou hast been pleased to exercise mercy towards the sinful children of men. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour we know of this mercy; he indeed is the mercy of God in human form, our Priest, our Saviour, our only Intercessor, mighty in all things, but mightiest in the intercession of his love. We would hide ourselves in Jesus Christ; he is our safety, our security; the rock that cannot be broken into by thief or robber, or overwhelmed by fiercest storm. Hide us in thyself, thou Rock of Ages, then shall we be safe for ever from fear of man, and from all other fear.

We have come with a great, broad, loud psalm in our heart, for our joy is great and our thankfulness unutterable in mortal speech. We look back and behold a great light; on either hand we look, and behold a rod and a staff, and if we venture to trespass and look for one moment into the future, there is no trouble there; the clouds will roll away and the broad bright morning will shine upon our life. We wish to trust thee more, our desire is to go out of ourselves, to bid farewell to our own devices and defences, and to cast ourselves upon the wisdom and the protection of our Father in heaven. We have heard wonderful things of thee, we know they are all true, for we ourselves have tested them word by word, and are to-day thy living witnesses, showing forth the abundance of thy goodness and the sureness of thy promises.

Thou hast dried our tears, thou hast recovered us from many a slip; when the enemy has taken us in his strong snares, thou hast broken every one of them and blessed us with renewal of liberty. We have played the fool, and prayed downwards instead of upwards, and our hearts have gone far astray from thee, yet has thy love been greater than our sin, thy grace has overflowed our guilt, and by the infinitude of thy mercy and thy love we have been brought back again from far off places, and set once more within the warmth of our Father's house. We bless thee for all thy care. There is nothing too small for thee to look at. Thou governest the heavens and thou blessest little children. Thou lightest the lamps which flame across the universe, and thou dost make the lily beautiful in its quiet place. Thou numberest the hairs of our head, our tears thou dost put in thy bottle, our heart throbs thou dost count one by one; when the last pulsation comes, our immortality shall begin.

We have come to bless thee: this was our set purpose; our one meaning was to lift up the psalm high as heaven, until it filled thine ear, and made thee glad with our filial love. We now commend ourselves to thy keeping. We would not live one

day without thee : we would live and move and have our being in God. We would rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him ; we would have no desire that cannot be satisfied by his grace. Our hearts would be as temples of the Holy Ghost, in which the loving One reigns and rules with all the omnipotence of love. The Lord purify us by the blood of sacrifice, the Lord wash us in the holy, sacred stream that flowed from the Saviour's riven side, the Lord give us to know the mystery of pardon and the joy of adoption into his family.

We commend also unto thee all whom we love and for whom we ought to pray. As patriots we remember our country and say, God save the Queen, bless the land, make its harvest abundant and its commerce prosperous, and let all the people sitting at the table of plentifulness remember who spread the banquet, and praise the Lord with a life of love. We remember our sick ones, too, for whom we have prayed many a prayer, and for whom we seem to be unable to do aught that is really effectual for their bodily recovery. We can do more, and we do it now : we pray that thy grace may be greater than their weakness, and that in their hearts there may be a sacred joy, a very rapture and song of triumph, a victory greater than all the distresses which make them weak.

We pray for those from whom we are separated for awhile, for our friends on the great wide sea—the Lord give the winds and the waves charge concerning them. For our loved ones in far away lands, for our sons and daughters in the colonies, for all for whom we ought to pray, of every class and name, the Lord bind us together in the bonds of a true love. Being one in Christ, may our fellowship be complete and lasting.

Let thy word dwell in us richly, let thy gospel come to us this morning as a singing angel, coming with sweet messages from thy heart, and may we listen to every tone and give broad welcome to every word from heaven. Amen.

REVIEW OF THE WHOLE CHAPTER.

THE second chapter of Matthew is a record of *trials*. Everybody engaged in the tragedy seems to have been pierced through and through with the same sharp sword. This is the more wonderful, seeing that the object of the chapter is to set up *the kingdom of heaven* amongst men. One would have supposed that with a purpose so lofty and so beneficent, the career would have been one perfectly clear of all difficulty, broadening like a dawning day, and offering to every one engaged a right hearty welcome, and crowning each toiler with a gentle and loving benediction. If the people engaged in this exciting narrative had been about to do something very *bad*, we would have followed their punishment with keen interest, and after each infliction of the deserved blow we would have said, "This is merited ; no man can do wrong and yet enjoy prosperity." But nothing of the kind is here. With one exception everybody wants to do what is *good* so far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned, and yet every one engaged in this marvellous development of human history is smitten, pierced, thrown down, banished, or otherwise visited with some heavy and inexplicable penalty. This chapter is a record of trials, and these trials acquire a keener accent and a more painful significance from the fact that they all occur in connection with the establishment of a beneficent king-

dom, whose avowed object is the salvation and holiness and infinite blessedness of all who accept its dominion.

There are trials purely *personal*, for example those of Joseph and Mary. Mary comes into the story by the pressure of an infinite destiny. She does not ask to be an actor in this scene—she is modest; violet-like she seeks the shade, she craves for no renown, she does not ask to be put in the fore-front of any battle or contest. Yet to pains of divers kinds is added the agony of misunderstanding and banishment, suspicion of the foulest kind and abandonment by those who should have loved her most. This, in connection with setting up the Christly kingdom on the earth! Our narrow, short-sighted sympathy says she might have been *spared* this; an angel might have rolled a white cloud for her to sit upon as upon a throne. Instead of this, behold the severity of her lot, behold what unmerited punishment darkens her little patch of sky and makes her earth barren and desolate, without green thing or root of promise.

And Joseph, a negative character, a man who is in, and yet hardly knows why he is in, the story, sustaining an incidental and relative position to it, wholly secondary, almost yet not altogether needless,—even he is afflicted with great visions and great distresses, startled by unexpected ghosts, aroused from his sleep that he may be told to flee away as if he were an offender against human law and social decency. He must needs be up and flee like a thief in the night-time. And all this, in connection with introducing to the world the only Friend it ever had! These historical recollections would always be interesting to minds who study the unity of the human race, but they are more than interesting, they are religiously suggestive and comforting to those who remember that all these trials are repeated in the life of every honest man and woman to-day.

Then there were trials, *imperial* as well as personal. *Herod* was troubled. Not Herod the individual man, but Herod the *king*. His throne, which had been steady as a rock, began to quake under him, and he said, "What ghost is shaking this firm seat?" He was distracted, his mind was split in two, he was in perplexity, in intellectual vexation—he could not bring the pieces together and shape them into coherence and meaning. He was a shrewd man, a man to whom councillors appealed in the time of their perplexity, a man high in authority, to whom was committed the giving of great decisions; and yet something occurred in his history which brought a great blinding mist over his eyes. He mistook distance, proportion, colour, he could see nothing as it really was; he rubbed his eyes to cleanse them of the mist, but it grew as he rubbed, and he was blinder at the last than at the first. And this, let us constantly remember, in connection with setting up a kingdom of light and peace, righteousness and love.

Instead of the king having the first revelation, and receiving that revelation as the earth receives the bright morning, he seems to have been left

out of the count altogether. He stumbles into it, he does not walk lovingly and loyally into this inheritance. The revelation is a ghost, a flash of light, a rattle of thunder, a shaking of the throne, a darkening of the window, an overturning of the hot brain. Herod cannot speak coherently; all other questions have dwindled into commonplace or into trifles since this great inquiry thrust itself on his reluctant but startled mind. Hitherto he has sat on his throne or presided over his court, he has been attentive to every one, and has meted out justice with an even hand, with a balance that could not be tampered with. He has acted in a manner that claimed and secured the confidence of those who were round about him, but a question has arisen in his intellectual thinking which makes all other questions mean and covers them with infinite contempt. Since that question arose and gave direction and colour to his thinking, all the questions that he had hitherto thought to be great have fallen away from their eminence, and he can hardly command patience to consider and balance and decide the trifling inquiries. This again would be an interesting historical fact, if it were only confined to Herod himself, but it broadens into something greater, brightens into something more fascinating, when we remember that this trouble, vexation, or pain is repeated in the case of every king and every country receiving or inquiring about the Son of God.

Surely the trials end here? We must now have come to the end of the blank catalogue. The light will come now. As a faithful expositor of the Word, I must say, not yet can the light come. There were trials personal, as in the case of Joseph and Mary; there were trials imperial, as in the case of Herod the king; I have to add, in pathetic and distressing culmination, that there were trials *domestic*, as in the massacre of the innocents. "Herod was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under." It was truly called the massacre of the innocents, it was making the many suffer for the one; it was a picture of the indiscriminate vengeance of excited and uncontrollable human nature. It was the thrust of a blind man who said, "I will strike who comes first, if haply I may strike the offender." Who can calculate the number of little ones slain by that fierce and cruel sword? Who can hear the mourning, lamentation, great weeping and distress? We stand a thousand years and more away from those desolated and depeopled homes; we can take with some comfort a tragedy two thousand years old, but that is to our shame and not to our honour. It is possible to set ourselves back along the historical line, far enough to sympathise with those whose children were given up to that unsparing sword. All this, let me say again, was in connection with the setting up of the kingdom of Jesus Christ upon the earth! A sword through his mother's heart, a shadow across the path of his reputed father, a king smitten by invisible lightning, troubled as with a cloud terrible with

the presence of innumerable ghosts, homes made black because of the death of little children. All this was not in our reckoning. This never came into our dream. No poet dare have dreamt this poem; it would have damned his reputation. Truth is stranger than fiction, reality is hardly reached by poetry; when it is the highest poetry of all it is the most real, it touches heights which men call insanity.

What then have we, as Christian readers, to say about these trials in their relation to the kingdom of heaven? I have three things to say about them, and the first is that the kingdom of heaven, as represented by Jesus Christ, was *not responsible* for them. It is a fine matter, is this allotment of responsibility. We are sometimes occasions without being causes. Who is responsible for the pain suffered by that poor man whose limb is being amputated at this moment? Do we say, "Cruel surgeon, why do you inflict such pain on a fellow creature?" We do not hold the surgeon responsible for the agony of the sufferer: he may be the occasion of it, but he inflicts agony that he may save from some greater distress. You must look into causes preceding the ministry of the surgeon; the limb was beginning to putrify—it was momentary agony or death, and the surgeon beneficently advised the infliction of transient pain. When he said, "Cut off the limb," he did not say it loudly or unfeelingly, he spoke the language of sympathy and beneficence. Let us know that in all our education and uplifting pain is unavoidable, because of the moral condition into which we have brought ourselves. When the father uses the rod upon the criminal child, does he inflict the pain cruelly? He inflicts it beneficently. If he loved less he would strike less, if he were less loving he would be less severe. His very severity is an expression of his pity and yearning love.

It is hard to understand this, it cannot be defended as a mere theory; it is not open to any discussion that could be conducted in words, but it comes up as a great fact in the swelling human heart, that sometimes we are obliged to prove our love by our severity. When the Son of God came into the world there was no room for him: he had to make room for himself, and sometimes when a tree makes room for itself it overthrows old walls and strong buildings—those silent, ever swelling roots thrust out the masonry of man.

This leads me to say, in the second place, that these trials were part of a *happy necessity*. All education is but another word for pain, trial, trouble, discipline. The education that comes otherwise may disappear as it came. We learn by pain, we advance by strange and often intolerable agonies, we cannot understand why our ignorance should be driven away only by processes that tear and wear the finest sensibilities of the soul. Look back upon your education: oh the headaches, the smartings, the disappointments, the troubles, the evasions; and yet the result of the whole is wis-

dom. Your will was curbed at every point, your little plans were turned upside down, you were made to know that you must begin at this hour and work till that appointed time, or if not you must suffer the penalty. The tasks we had, the lines to commit to memory, the sharp visitations of the rod, the chidings and reproachings and scoldings and buffetings, the shamings with the uplifted finger of the mocking master, and yet now, somehow, it seems as if all these things worked together, being duly and lovingly controlled, to the formation of a massive and broad character not easy of destruction.

As civilization widens, trials multiply. You could not introduce the locomotive engine into your English civilization without a great massacre of innocents. When the locomotive engine took his breath and gave his first utterance into the startled air, what a slaughter there was all over the country of innocent speculators, innocent investors, innocent people of all kinds. What vested interests went down, what arrangements of stabling and hostelry and hospitality of every kind were knocked on the head. Every grand improvement in civilization means death as well as life, in proportion as a man or an improvement is great. No introduction can be effected into old habits or established upon old lines without great rending and tearing of things long-existent. No preacher could come into London with any dominating power of light and wisdom without having to make room for himself and inflict pain upon many innocent people. He would not be otherwise admitted. He must come by fighting, battling, blood, fury, vehemence, for seven years be suspected and misunderstood, and reproached, and only as the divinity is within him would he create his own space and liberty. His friends would be troubled, driven off into Egypt; all Herods would shake on their thrones, and innocent people of all kinds would be caught in a shower of stones. It is the mystery of civilization; it belongs to the widening course of things; it is true of all departments of life.

The third thing I have to say about these trials is that they imperfectly, yet definitely, represent the *greater trials of God* in the education and maintenance of his universe. He can do nothing without pain. He is tried every day. He builds a wall around his vineyard and sets up a tower in it; and he comes at the appointed time to gather the grapes that he may crush them into wine for his heart's drinking, and behold the vineyard bringeth forth wild grapes. He nourishes and brings up children: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but his children do not know, do not consider, take their bread as if it had come from the earth, and not fallen from heaven, drink their unblest water, and sleep an irreligious slumber. He looks on from the heavens with a great face of trouble, more marred than the face of any man. He cannot rule his children without being insulted every day. He cannot

propose to add one beam of light to the glory which falls upon them without criticism that amounts to impiety, or without reproaches that add up to the sum total of blasphemy.

Let us not, then, suppose that these are merely historical trials, and that they have no counterpart in the current experience of the day or in the mysteries of the divine government of man. The glory of the New Testament is that it is new. I would not charge myself with boldness if I undertook to show that every line in this New Testament was printed only yesterday, so true is it to human life, so photographic of everything that is immediately round about us, so ardent with the warmth of our own life, so throbbing with all that is quick in our own pulsations. Hast thou read the New Testament as an old book, say sixteen or eighteen hundred years old? I do not wonder that thou hast stumbled in many places and been caught in many a thicket, and in trying to disentangle thyself hast come to great difficulty and distress. I read the New Testament as just written, just put into my hands, printed afresh with the ink of heaven every morning, and sent down for the day's guidance. It is the part of the Christian preacher to freshen old histories, to throw upon them the dew of the morning, and make them sparkle with immediate light.

What is true of these trials, so far as the establishment of the kingdom of Christ upon the broad earth is concerned, is painfully and often insufferably true of the setting up of the kingdom of heaven in the *individual heart*. It is not easy to go over from Baal to Jehovah. Some of us are now only on the road, with the journey merely begun, though we have been five-and-twenty years endeavouring to take a step or two. Could I address some dear young heart, looking upon these statements as great mysteries, that heart would say to me, "Oh, you must be such a happy man, you are free from all these trials and bitternesses, and are already in Beulah's fair land, blest with the spirit of peace, lighted with the glories of heaven, far above the cold winds and darkening fogs. You have accomplished the journey." To that sweet speech I should make a frank reply. For days, and weeks, and months, dear child, I know not what joy is. Sometimes I feel as if I were worse now than I ever was in my whole Christian life before. My wonder is that I am not damned and put out of sight. God has hard work with me: it is difficult for him to build his temple in such a heart as mine: the devil will not let me lay one stone upon the top of another without trying to throw it down, the enemy will not let me get one whole prayer right clear out of me—he stands at my mouth to prevent the word, to twist the prayer. Whilst I am in my highest moods of communion, he whispers to me with hot breath, "What a fool you are: this is mockery, this is emptiness; take your prayer back, you impious idiot, and use your breath for other work." Still the kingdom of heaven is going on in my heart; other voices say, "Cheer thee;

thy way is one of tribulation, but the end is peace. Fear not, they that are for thee are more than all they that can be against thee. God will accomplish his purpose little by little, but he will have the victory. Great are they that are against thee, greater they that are for thee. Hold up thy head, fear not, the angel will break the power of the enemy, and out of thy distress shall come thy joy."

These words fall on the breaking heart with infinite healing, and comfort me with a sure hope. By-and-by we shall say to some watcher, fairer than the morning light, "What are these arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" He will answer, "These are they that came out of great tribulation." Tribulation is another word for education if rightly accepted. Let me, then, cheer you and cheer myself. It is a hard fight, the trials are thick on the ground, the air is black with them, but we shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved us." Be this your motto: "*The Sword of the Lord—and Forward!*"

VII.

THE CONTINUOUSNESS OF HISTORY—REPENTANCE A COMMON TERM—
TEACHING POSITIVE AS WELL AS NEGATIVE—THE TRUE BAPTISM.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our voice is lifted up to thee in praise and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, because of all thy tender mercy and thy loving kindness shown unto us since we last assembled here. Thou dost lead us by ways that we know not, and unexpected answers dost thou give to our trouble and our want. We look back to behold a long line of light: that line is thy love, thy care, thy patience; and as we look forward we behold a long line of golden promise and tender assurance, so that we have no fear clouding and darkening our hearts. This is the Lord doing, this is the gift of heaven, this is the revelation of God's love to our life, though it be dark, dark with sin and vexed with many cares. What time we are afraid, we put our trust in God; when the sky is black, we know that the sun is still there, and that no force but thine can shake that source of light. Help us to know that the troubles of this life are for a moment, but as their season is short, so their visitation is often sharp. May we put our trust in thy love and righteousness and tender care, and be quiet, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Thou hast written thy testimony in our life, thou hast proved thyself every day of our individual history. Thou hast made us and not we ourselves, we are the people of thy pasture and the sheep of thine hand. Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust; every bone thou didst fashion, our reason thou didst set upon its throne, our whole life is brightened by the light of thy presence, and as for the troubles which vex and divide us, behold thou dost so direct them as to bring joy out of our greatest sorrow. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? We will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord, yea, with loudness as men call who are burning with the fire of earnestness. We will not restrain our song before God, but with loud hallelujahs will we praise thee for thy wonderful care, thy continual mercy.

We come always to Jesus, because he is the same yesterday, to-day, for ever,—always full of love, full of pity, full of thought for our whole life. He died for us and rose again; he is our Saviour; and he is our intercessor; for us he shed his blood, for us he breathed away his heart in priestly prayer. We have no other Saviour; we need no other. His blood is our answer to thy law, his cross the sanctuary of the soul when pursued by its guilt.

We bless thee that we are in thine house, for it is good to be here. Thou dost cause a great calm to fill the sanctuary, and the spirit of peace speaks to the sons of peace, and having fellowship one with another, and with our common Father, great love floods the soul. Forgetting earth and time and dreary sense, we already claim

the heritage bought for us by our Saviour Christ. Enjoying this opportunity of communion with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, may we return to the family, to the market-place, to all the daily engagements of life, with renewed purity of soul, elevation of purpose, and breadth of charity, accepting our little life as a great opportunity, and diligently working with both hands, not as hired servants, but as loving sons.

Set up thy kingdom within our heart—call it kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, kingdom of light, kingdom of truth—we shall know it by what name soever it is called, for it will absorb all other masteries and rule us with infinite and gracious dominion. Help us to see the best of one another, teach us to read each other's life in the light of divine hope and redeeming love, fill our hearts with the very love of Christ, and may we prove discipleship by the cross.

Thou knowest the need of every heart, the pain of the wounded spirit, the joy of the delivered soul, the song of those who have great hope, and the purpose of those whose to-morrow is bright with great gladness. The Lord come to us according to our varied necessities, and according to the want or the joy of each heart, let thy blessing be measured unto us. When our purpose is evil, turn our counsel upside down with a ruthless hand; when our aim is good, help us to accomplish our whole purpose. Break the arm that is lifted in rebellion against light, truth, beauty, holiness, and all heavenliness of love and purpose.

The Lord give strength unto those whose desire it is to make the world gladder day by day. The Lord look upon the old man whose life is behind him and speak some gospel of hope to his waiting soul. The Lord speak to the young man that he may estimate the number of his days and their brevity, and work in the spirit of the solemn responsibility. The Lord look upon the missionary at home, the loving mother, the gracious parent, the one who sacrifices herself for her children, and loves them with unutterable affection. The Lord look into the nursery, into the cradle, into the school, among all our young and loved ones, and baptize them with the dew of the morning. The Lord be the physician in the sick chamber, and bear his own gospel to hearts that can listen to no human tongue. The Lord's light brighten over the whole heavens until there be no shadow left. Amen.

MATTHEW iii. 1-6.

1. In those days (thirty years after the events of Chapter II.) came (*cometh*) John the Baptist, preaching (after the manner of a *herald*), in the wilderness of Judæa (bordering on the Jordan and the Dead Sea).

2. And saying, repent ye (change your mind and purpose): for the kingdom of heaven (a phrase used by Matthew about thirty times, and by him only in the New Testament) is at hand (has come nigh),

3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan (the whole length of the river valley, including parts of Perea, Samaria, Galilee, and Gaulonitis).

6. And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

If you read the last verse of the second chapter—“And he came and

dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene"—and then read the first verse of the third chapter—"In those days came John the Baptist"—you might suppose that the two events followed one another within a very brief interval, whereas the fact is that *thirty years* intervened between the last verse of the second chapter and the first verse of the third. The heart is sad at that thought: we do not want the historian to take such wide leaps; we want him to take us down to Nazareth, and give us almost daily glimpses into that obscure but wondrous home. We long to overhear somewhat of the conversation that passes amongst its inmates; especially do we want to look at one with a human face, brightened often with divine flashes, and to listen to a voice like our own, yet much unlike it, so rich, so varied, so tender in pathos, so royal in command. Yet we stand here, at the opening of the third chapter (with one glimpse given by another writer) with thirty years overleaped in silence that is to the imagination provoking.

"In those days came"—literally "in those days *cometh*," as if all the movement were continuous, without break or gap, as if there were no past tense, as if we lived in a perpetual present, as if history were a continuous breathing, not a succession of shocks, but a perpetual outgo of the divine purpose and the heavenly will. We have broken up our grammar so that we now have present, past, perfect, pluperfect, and future, but there is another grammar in which there is but one mood and one tense, and it is Christ's purpose to draw us up into his own thinking, until all history and all developments, the whole sweep and current of things, shall be to us a living indicative. You go back to take up the past, you break life up into sections, you cut it up into parentheses, you vex the flowing narrative with foot-notes and marginalia, so that I am lost in this wondrous history of the race. He calms me by completing me, withdraws my attention from fractional times and momentary incidents, and fixes it upon the infinite oneness of the divine purpose and way.

In those days came John the *Baptist*. A *transient* name. The Baptist must die, the Congregationalist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian must die—his very *name* is indicative of the transientness of his coming and purpose. No man can be known by any one little accent of his case throughout immortality. When a man is so specialized the meaning is that his mission is here and gone, whilst you are speaking about him—a breath, a shock, a voice, an echo, a vacancy. Do you still follow the Baptist? Poor laggard, what business hast thou, in this nineteenth century, with following the Baptist? He himself said his mission was introductory, symbolical, a plunge, and all was over. Why art thou still dogging his steps, as if he had ought to give thee? He has eaten up the locusts and wild honey, and his raiment and his leathern girdle are worn out and are not worth thy picking up. O haste thee to catch his Master.

Still, John had a mission, and a great one ; and it will be our object to measure it in future expositions. John the Baptist came *preaching*—a term but little understood. There are few preachers, and ought to be few. There are too many who bear the name who do not understand the vocation. He is not a preacher who stands in one place year after year, talking to the same people, and overfeeding them with intellectual luxuries. Preaching, in the New Testament, is a term which means *heralding*, going up and down from east to west, crying, shouting, with a ringing voice, "Prepare !" He is the preacher who does so, who breathes through the herald's trumpet, and startles the stagnant air with shattering blasts and says, "The King ! the King !" In our days we have degraded preaching into bending the head over a sheet of ill-written paper and mumbling it with very uncertain emphasis. In the New Testament the preacher is the shouting man. We do not like shouting ; we object to exclamation ; but the true preacher is the *vox clamantis*. "Prepare ! look out ! attention !" After the preacher of course will come the teacher, the pastor, the expositor, the man whose business it is to stand in one place and unfold the infinite riches of the divine wisdom ; but the preacher—defining that term in the light of the New Testament—is a herald, a man who has a proclamation in his hands, whose sermon is brief because not a speech well composed and elaborate, but a cry, as of a man who should call "*Fire*" to a sleeping town.

"In those days came John the Baptist, saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The cry of all widening civilization has been *Repent*. Do not be startled with the word, as if it were a church term and a Bible word only ; it is a word you cannot do without in the history of secular civilization. Do not sneer at the preacher when he says "Repent," as if he had picked up a fanatical word and were using it for fanatical purposes. What is the meaning of this word *repent*, as used in this connection ? The meaning of it is, change your purpose, alter your mind, turn round, face about, you are on the wrong road, *return* ! It is the utterance of men who have a new proposition to make in politics, in commerce, in engineering, in all the ways and processes of advancing life. He who corrects the thinking of his age, having verified his own conclusions in privacy, comes forth and says to his era, "Repent, you are wrong, change your mind, alter your standpoint." When the word is taken up into the religious sphere, and invested with its vital meanings, it still continues the first signification, and enhances that signification with other meanings deeper and grander still. When a man repents of his sin, he knows the bitterness of inward sorrow, his heart weeps blood, his soul is afflicted with grievous distress on account of sin. Then the repentance expresses itself in an outward change of standing, attitude and relationship, coming up out of an inward conviction wrought through infinite pain, and by ministries for which there are no words.

John's, then, was not a very *cheerful* ministry, or a very popular or comfortable one. It is pleasanter for me to come down to any assembly and say, "I approve all your doings, I confirm your proceedings, I endorse your policies, Heaven's blessing shine upon you like a summer day!" He who comes with a speech of that kind to the populace, will for the time being be the popular idol. To come into the midst of a city, or to go up and down a land, crying "Repent," is to excite the most desperate prejudice. Who are you? Why this challenging tone? *quo warranto?* Prove your standing: whence came you, what is the measure of your responsibility? Then will come insinuations as to sinister motive, and implications of dishonest or selfish purpose. Then the *tu quoque* will be the weapon of the hour. The man whose little sermon is "Repent" sets himself against his age, and will for the time being be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man—"off with his head." You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to Heaven.

The *negativeness* of this ministry accounts for what is popularly termed the want of *success*. John's ministry was to clear the ground; he was a pioneer, he was a herald, he was one whose work was more or less of the negative kind, or introductory at the best. Such men do not add up to much in the sum total of vulgar arithmetic. When they are added up into their total by *God* himself the sum is not inconsiderable. We have reformers amongst us whose business it is to get men into a state of mind to hear the gospel. Having heard the gospel and received it, the men who conducted the introductory ministry are too often forgotten, as though they had done next to nothing. Your business it may be, is to go out and persuade a man to alter his personal habits and his social relationships so as to bring himself within the sound of the Christian gospel. He comes to hear the minister; the minister, baptized with fire and clothed with zeal, arrests the man, and makes him a prisoner of the law. It may be that your outside and comparatively negative work is forgotten by men, but *God* is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love. Yours is a preparational ministry; yours is introductory, and because introductory more or less transient in its public effects and fame. Nevertheless it is a ministry without which the Church cannot live. Persevere through good report and through evil report, and come not to Time's low counter for your pay, but to the judgment-seat of Christ.

Consider well what it is to preach the gospel of repentance. I would rather preach the gospel of *comfort*; it would suit me personally better to say to every man who hears me, "You are altogether right; all you need is comfort, the kiss and seal of holy peace. Cheer you; it will be well with you." To stand before any man, and say to him, "If we are to make solid work we must begin with the fact that you are as bad as you can be,"

is to excite prejudice and to create tremendous, if not insuperable, difficulty. Here is the disadvantage of the preacher; he has always to challenge his hearers, charge them with want of integrity; his indictment is heavy, every count of it rising above every other count before it in the gravity of its impeachment. The lecturer comes before you with his kid gloves and scented arrangements, and tells you how delighted he is to have the opportunity of speaking to so large, enlightened, and influential an assemblage. The preacher stands up and says, "Repent"; and who likes to listen to a man whose voice is a charge, whose sentences are thunderbolts? Yet through this ministry of repentance we must all pass ere we can enter into a ministry of reconciliation, and enjoy the infinite calm of God's own peace.

Yet John's ministry was not wholly negative. There is a positive element in it, that should be carefully noted. He said, indeed, "Repent ye," but his deliverance did not end there. He added a reason, "For, or because, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Do not charge your hearer severely, so as to overwhelm him with intolerable sorrow. Having brought him to his knees in penitence, and broken his heart with contrition, and left him without a rag with which to cover the nakedness of his iniquity, tell him that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, intimating that his repentance is a sorrow that brings joy, that repentance is an introductory necessity, that it endures for a night, and joy cometh, bringing with it its own morning, a day that never dips into the darkness of eventide. So this heroic preacher, so severe, so terrible in aspect, so piercing and rending in voice, has a sweet, sweet tone—"The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The morning cometh, the summer dawns, the rain is over and gone, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. Attend, repent, change, turn round—for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." A challenge of moral integrity should always be associated with the presentation of a great opportunity. Tell a man to repent only, and leave him there, and you put a dart into his breast. Tell him to repent, and add that the kingdom of heaven, with all its light and healing and redemption, is at hand, and you preach to him something like a complete gospel. The indictment associated with the word repentance must be followed with the inspiration connected with the term, the kingdom of heaven.

"This is he that was spoken of by the prophet." Every preacher who deeply moves his age, is a fulfilment of prophecy. The great man is always *to come*. History is a process of daily fulfilment of prophecy. We are always startled with conformations of the Divine Word, and when the right man comes, there is something about him which indicates his reality. My sheep know my voice. When a man hears the truth, there is something within him which says, "So it is." I may resent what you say to me, may put my imagination to great stress, for the purpose of getting up excuses

and pleas in reply to your charges, when you accuse me of being guilty before God, yet all the while, deep down in my self-reproachful heart, I feel that you are right, and that my palliations do but add to my sin.

What was the *result* of this man's preaching, so far as this section of the history will enable us to judge? There went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan. See the power of *one* consecrated and burning heart. John was one—the whole valley of the river was shaken by his voice, and men poured around him from every quarter. Believe in *individuality* of labour, believe that you, solitary thinker, lonely teacher, preacher, reformer—that you in your solitariness may have the power given you of God, of moving a whole age and inspiring a whole nation. Take the large view of your mission; do not be behind the very chief of the apostles, not in your own conceit, but in your interpretation of the breadth and grandeur of the divine call. Everywhere do I read of great results attending one man's ministry. One man is sometimes an army, one man is sometimes a congregation. Despise not the two and the three; there is a religion which can condescend to bless meetings of twos and threes: consider that that condescension is a proof of the divinity of the doctrine. That which is artificial works for the artificial, that which is real works for the human, the vital, the image of God. To-day we call out for thousands to hear us, and if the thousands are not there, we think but little of the few who gather in the house of God. If we were in right mood of heart we should see in every little child an opportunity for preaching with all the fire that could burn in the heart of the most consecrated patriot or a twice-anointed minister of God.

Get away from the baptism of John as soon as you can. We are not always to be standing in introductory rites and ceremonial observances. Again and again would I say that the ministry of John was by its very constitution a temporary and not a permanent ministry. Is it possible that there are men and women amongst us to-day, squabbling with one another about the matter of baptism? With what baptism you have been baptized I care not—if you have been baptized with the dew of the morning, sprinkled with hands prelatric or archiepiscopal—care not if you have been plunged in the middle of all the great seas that roll round the earth. Such baptism is nothing if it has not been followed by the true baptism of *blood* and *FIRE*. Into what baptism, then, have we been baptized? I believe that a sound argument can be set up in favour of the suggestion that in Christian baptism since the apostolic days there is *no water at all*. It does not follow that you must have water in order to have baptism, but, my friend, if you want the Atlantic have it: if the drop of dew trembling on the rosebud will suffice you, take it, but they are both nothing but ritualism, ceremonialism and superstition, if you do not seize the inner meaning,

cry for the laver of blood, and mightily implore God to visit you with the baptism of fire.

See that the baptismal water does not freeze upon you, and encrust you as with ice, and make a bigot of you. The one baptism of which all other baptisms were indications, types and symbols, is the baptism of blood and the chrism of fire.

VIII.

JOHN'S PREACHING—THE RIGHT SPIRIT OF HEARING—THE OLD GRIT IS LOST—A KINGDOM OR A WRATH—DIFFERENT REPORTS OF PREACHING.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our mouth is filled with thanksgiving, because our heart is stirred with gratitude. Thou hast done great things for us, and most wonderful, therefore is our mouth opened in praise, therefore are our hands stretched out to thee in the offer of loving service. Thou hast beset us behind and before and laid thine hands upon us, and thine eye has gleamed from heaven like a great sun, shining upon all our way, bringing us continual light and hope. Thou hast lifted us above our fears, so that the clouds have rolled under our feet, and we have seen thy bright blue morning spreading over our whole destiny, like a father's blessing. Thou art great, thou art kind, thy name is mercy, thy ministry is love. These things have we learned in our heart in its deep pain and want, and having learned them, we would turn them into religious hymns and continual and delightful service. Thou art our God, and we have none beside; thine hand is the treasury of our almightiness, and in thine heart is hidden the gospel of our salvation. We will look unto the hills whence cometh our help; we will repair to the Saviour's cross in the time of infinite distress on account of sin, and through his most precious blood, shed for the sins of the whole world, our guilt shall receive the answer of thy forgiveness.

We bless thee for this uplifted cross, a tree higher than all forests, a spectacle that makes all other sights dull and poor—the great tragedy of thy love. To that tree we come: its leaves are for the healing of the nations, and other healing for the heart of man there is none. This is the Lord's doing; may we within its span be in the Lord's spirit, lifted up in heart, made ecstatic in joy, having around us all the sweet bright ministry of holy hope. Being delivered from every fear, freed from every snare, and delivered from every perplexity, may our souls become filled with thy joy and soothed and calmed by thy peace.

We mourn our sin: 'tis our daily cry; we have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done—the Lord's mercy be multiplied unto us, and all the ministry of Christ be sent to our aid. Let us every one hear the utterance of thy forgiving love, let the most burdened conscience be delivered from its load, let the wounded and crying heart be healed of its pain, and over all the assembly may there pass the assurance of thy pardon, and may there return upon our life the lifting up of the light of thy countenance.

We bless thee for all thy blessings: they are in our individual life, for thou hast continued unto us health and strength and reasoning power and hope within the limits of this present scene. Thou hast blessed us in basket and in store, so that our trade has brought profit and our merchandise has yielded us a living. Thou hast given us favour in the sight of the people, so that our foothold in society is not lost.

Thou hast saved us from many a temptation and delivered us from many a sin and snare, so that our feet walk in the ways of freedom and we breathe the air of liberty. Thou hast blessed us in the family ; the father and the mother and the child are here, reunited, returned to one another, in the grace and fulness of thy protection. The Lord continue all household mercies to us : spare the elder and the younger, may there be no vacant chair, no empty heart, no desolated spirit. Where thou hast sent thy bereaving providence send thine all-healing grace ; where thou hast but now dug the deepest grave ever dug in the heart, the Lord fill it up with flowers, and so set upon it the sign and seal of a sure, glorious resurrection. Where the house is dark, do thou kindle an unexpected fire ; where the life is impoverished, do thou come with all thy treasure about it.

The Lord heal the wounded, the Lord carry the tired in his arms, the Lord bless the unblest, and send dew upon the withering flower. Thou knowest us every one, our ancestry, our difficulties, our temptations, our temperaments—peculiarities which individualize us one from the other. Thou knowest all that is in us and about us—be the God of each life, the Saviour of each heart, the friend of each pilgrim.

Give thy word mighty wings to-day, that it may fly farther than ever : make the voices of thy servants sweeter than trumpets of silver and louder than shocks of thunder, and let thy word be heard everywhere, awakening and gladdening the hearts of men.

Pity us in our littleness and infirmity, make the way down to the grave as easy as thou canst, and may the farewells of earth have in them tones subtle and tender, suggesting reunion in heaven. Amen.

MATTHEW iii. 7-12.

7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation (brood) of vipers, who hath warned (taught) you to flee from the wrath (a *kingdom* to some, a *wrath* to others) to come ?

8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance :

9. And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to (*as*) our father : for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ("God is not tied to the law of succession in the church.")

10. And now (already) also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees (the Jews : the Gentiles were *stones*) : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance ; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire :

12. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner ; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

THIS is a wonderful, yet not difficult, change of tone in the speech of such a man as John the Baptist. His baptism was the sensation of the day. Everybody seemed to have more or less interest in it. Not to have heard it was to be misinformed or wanting in information, and not to have partaken of it was to have missed a great opportunity. All the valley of the Jordan was moved, people poured in from every centre, great and small, in order that they might hear this new prophet, for a prophet had not appeared in Israel for five hundred years. Curiosity was touched,

wonder was on the alert, national pride was excited, and a great and hardly expressed hope was moving the ambition of the people.

For a long time John seems to have pursued his baptismal course without interruption, and indeed with some signs of satisfaction. There went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins—not, I imagine, confessing their sins in a minute and detailed manner, but generally acknowledging that they were not as good as they ought to have been, pleading guilty to a certain great, broad, general indictment, which all men probably over the civilized world are not unwilling to do. This was enough, as a starting point, in the case which John the Baptist represented. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, the great and leading men of the day, pure in their own estimation, not needing any such ministry as he came to conduct, except in an official and ceremonial manner, it changed his tone; he cried aloud with piercing and ringing voice, “O brood of vipers, progeny of serpents, deceitful, cunning, malignant, empoisoned, how do you account for being here? Who hath warned you, called you, who hath entitled you to avail yourselves of this opportunity?”

John was a man who recognised the possibility of people coming to religious ordinances from wrong motives. The people to whom he spake did not come for purely religious purposes at all. They thought it was something to be passed through in order to realize a great end. They accepted it as a little ceremonial, preceding some great national endowment or fulfilment of long delayed prophecy. John startled them, therefore, with the tidings that this was a religious ordinance, and that men can only avail themselves satisfactorily of religious ordinances in proportion as they come to them with religious motives.

Are the Pharisees and the Sadducees of the olden time the only people who have come to church through wrong motives? Is it possible that any of us can ever go to a holy place with unholy intent, or with a purpose infinitely below the grandeur of the opportunity? When I ask the questions I kill myself. Do I pierce any of your hearts, or wound, ever so slightly, any of your consciences? Whatever is religious must be touched religiously, or it will yield no true benefit or profit. You are not to touch the Bible as literary men, you are not to come to church as clever men, you are not to sit bolt upright as those who have a claim to judge in God's sanctuary. The attitude is abasement, the spirit is contrition, the desire is a yearning for a purer and broader life. “To this man will I look—the man that is of a humble and contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word.” The haughty he will bow down, the wise he will confound and disappoint. He will look to the eager heart, the gentle, simple, yearning spirit whose one object is to know God's will and to try to do it.

When men come to religious ordinances, they should be warned of the meaning of the action which they wish to accomplish. They should have a clear and most intelligent conception of the whole purpose of religious worship. It is the business of the heralds of the cross and the ministers of the truth to give this warning, to keep back those who have not the right credentials. This is a kingdom that can only be entered by one right, the right of sin, avowed, confessed, deplored. Blind man, your blindness is your certificate, you want no other. Broken-hearted, wounded man, your contrition or your penitence is your credential; seek for none beside. Weary, tired soul, altogether overborne and distressed by the burdens and difficulties of life, your weariness is your claim. Do not try to get up your strength. When you lie flat in your weakness, your attitude is most acceptable to Heaven. To try to gain your breath that you may appear with some decorousness in his presence is to enhance your sin. To come panting, heaving, out of breath, gasping, dying—that is the guarantee of a good hearing in the presence of God.

How comes it that people so little profit by religious ordinances? Because they are too clever, too wise, too conceited, too good, in their own estimation. I never heard Pharisees and Sadducees praise with religious gratitude any service they ever attended. They, mighty men, confer an honour, they add lustre to the altar, they lift up the church in which their self-vaunting supplications are uttered. How then can they, who are so full of themselves, who are enriched with the emptiness of their own self-satisfaction, gain any spiritual advantage from any church they ever entered? They do not go to church to get benefit, but to give it. Their purpose is to lay a flattering hand upon the infinite, and to bless it with the paw of their consecration. We should have been richer men to-day, broader and more massive in all religious instruction, intelligence, and force, if we had come with a true humbleness and bent down before God with an utter, absolute sense of unworthiness in his sight.

Surely he was a wilderness-trained man who spake thus to the high citizens of the day. Look at him, with his camel's hair and the leathern girdle about his loins, fed with locusts and wild honey. When he speaks, he will speak honey, but only in his speech to self-satisfied men there will be less honey than locusts. Upon some men you cannot confer any social advantage. They do not want it. What can I do for you, poor Diogenes, living in your tub? Nothing, but stand out of the light. The religious man ought never to be one to whom no favour can be shown. A man who can live in the wilderness, read the literature of the everlasting hills, and decipher the poetry of the skies, asks for no favour, can stoop to receive none; his is a marvellous independence of all social patronage and help. "Do not offend the Pharisees and the Sadducees, conciliate them, conceal as much as you can; they have it in their power to do great things for

you." Such might have been the speech spoken to this man with the camel's hair and the leathern girdle, fed on locusts and wild honey ; but he would have hurled it back again in shattering accents of scorn. So the religious teacher has it in his power to lift himself high above the line of patronage and the line of obligation, for religious men should be able to live upon nothing. Every true teacher of God should have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of, so that when men who misunderstand his mission come to him and say, "Let us hear your sermon, and then you shall have the loaf," he should be able to decline the loaf, to preach his discourse, and to vanish into the wilderness.

This gospel of Christ, either in its prophetic outlines, or in this transient dispensation of the Baptist, or in its full revelation in Jesus Christ, has never sought to make itself a popular religion in the sense of bowing down hopefully before thrones on which were seated kings that could confer advantages upon it. Its fierce, all but savage, independence always strikes me with infinite force. When the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to the baptism of John, he said, "You are a brood of vipers." He called them by their right name. We dare not use such names now, because we do not live in the wilderness, we live in a city ; we are not clothed with camel's hair and a leathern girdle about our loins, we have now gown and bands and a silken girdle, therefore we must be very complacent with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and with people who are socially tall. I heard a fine and most prosperous gentleman say that he entered a London church once and only once because in the course of the service the minister called some person who had been acting vilely—a wretch. "For that reason I have shut up the Bible—I heard a man call the most respectable citizens of his day a brood of vipers, a progeny of serpents, a nest of evil things. And I heard another man call a king a fox, and others he called whited sepulchres, hidden graves, actors, masked men." The age of free, clear, grand speech is dead : we have come into the age of euphonism. He is the bold man who so utters his sentences that nobody can quote them, who so rounds and oils them that it is impossible to retain them in the grasp. The old grit is lost, the old free piercing speech is gone ; we have alighted upon silken times, and hard words would not become the lips that cannot live but on the rich man's viands.

Though the gospel has never endeavoured to make itself popular in the sense of conciliating those who might confer patronage upon it, yet it has always welcomed with infinite pathos the hearts that felt their need of its redemption. No broken heart was ever turned away from the cross, no weary and overborne soul was ever discouraged by the Son of God. No poor bent woman, having nothing left but her touch of faith, was ever spurned by God's dear Son. He resents our fulness, not our poverty : it is when we are great he has nothing to say to us, not when we are little in our own esteem.

It is everywhere made clear in these Scriptures, that in coming for divine blessings we must renounce all human satisfactions. Nothing but emptiness can be heard at the divine bar. John gives a hint of this grand condition of entrance into the divine kingdom when he says, "Think not—literally plume not yourselves—by saying, We have Abraham for our father. This is a kingdom that knows nothing of these intermediate and transient relationships; this is not a kingdom of great families, it is a kingdom of humanity." Therefore, for John the Baptist, trained in the wilderness, to come up amid all these glittering things and to lay down this doctrine of the kingdom of Heaven being founded upon humanity, was a miracle then—it is a common-place now, because we have had full instruction upon gospel principles and purposes. But in John the Baptist's day to lay down this grand doctrine—here is a kingdom not for special families and particular kindreds, but for all the wide world—that was a consummation of all the miracles as well as a fulfilment of all the prophecies.

How difficult it is to break a man's prejudice when it rests upon considerations of the kind which John refers to. A man had Abraham to his father, therefore, he wildly reasons, it will be all right with him whatever may happen in the world. Christianity aims a destructive blow at all such pretences. This is the last fibre of badness. You cannot take out of some men a claim to God's favour, because of something ancestral or official represented by their individual life. Blessed are they who never heard of Abraham as compared with those who turn their Abrahamic ancestry into a prejudice against the divine kingdom or a condition of entering it. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are they who can say—

"Just as I am—without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee—
O Lamb of God, I come."

Who can reach this high degree of self-renunciation? Who can deliver himself from the prejudice that he has some claim to God's favour because his father built a church, because his father was a minister, because in his family religion has always had a place of consideration? Every one of us has to go before God as if his father had never lived, so far as the patronising of churches and religious sentiments is concerned. All false grounds of hope must be destroyed. God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham—which may be paraphrased thus: Do not suppose that God is dependent upon you for an ancestry, for a progeny, for a religious fame, or the nucleus of a divine kingdom. If you were all swept out of the earth to-day, he could have a family ten thousand strong to-morrow out of the pebbles that lie in the river's bed or on the face of

the wide desert. You cannot lay God under obligation : recognise that great truth, because it involves our proper relation to him as always receivers and never donors of the benefit.

“Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” This is the first time I have heard you say “wrath ;” when you began to preach you said, “the kingdom of Heaven.” How do you account for this change in your language and your tone? In reply to this inquiry John tells me that the Gospel of Christ is either a kingdom or a wrath. It is a saviour of life unto life, or a saviour of death unto death. It is a gospel or a judgment, a heaven or a hell, an eye turned towards the zenith of God’s heart, bright as a morning, or the same eye turned in kindling wrath towards the Egyptians, troubling the camp, and striking off the chariot-wheels though they be made of solid iron. This book cannot occupy a middle place in society. It is either *the* Book or no Book, a gospel or a lie, a religion or a blasphemy. No man can entertain an opinion of indifference regarding Jesus Christ. If he has considered the subject at all, he must worship Christ or crucify Him. He cannot be allowed to live as an indifferent person, about whom any opinions may be formed you please. When there is earnestness in the inquiry and the criticism, that earnestness ends in homage or crucifixion.

This sermon by John the Baptist is not the kind of introduction one would have expected to the incoming of the Son of God. No gentle tone seems to escape the lips of this man : it is as if a stormy whirlwind had caught him and borne him on through the wilderness of Judea, and as if a great fire were behind him as he earnestly makes his way. Strange and terrible are these words—Repent, Prepare, Axe, Purge his floor, Burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. In all these there is not one tone of conciliation, one smile of amiability, one outflow of cordiality. Yet this man comes before the Prince of Peace. Nor does he allude in this report to the gentler aspects of the coming One. He is taken up with the idea of power ; hence he says, “He that cometh after me is mightier than I.” The preacher in the wilderness deals with the idea of strength ; strength as a terror to evil, as a terrible judicial power. A melodious hymn, such as a peace would sing in a garden of flowers, might have been expected, trembling, quivering with hopeful joy ; but instead, there is a roar as of a sudden storm, and a cry as of unexpected terror. This is not the introduction I looked for, yet it is like the way of God in the making of human history. He is always setting aside human expectations, and building His temples in unlikely places and with unlikely material. God uses the storm. The ages are not all made up of long radiant summer days : night, and storm, and battle, as well as day, and calm, and peace, are God’s servants. This age requires voices that can be heard : the world’s vast wilderness is open, and the man that is needed now and in every age is the man who,

with throat of brass, inspired with iron lungs, can cry, "Repent." The church is now in danger of overfeeding the few and forgetting the hungry many. There is a work to be done in the wilderness; the manner appropriate to the wilderness may not be appropriate to the church; what is wanted, therefore, is adaptation, the loud cry or the subdued tone—both are wanted, and always will be wanted, to meet the world's great want.

Yet how incomplete it would be to say that this report of John's ministry given in the gospel by Matthew fully represents the work done by the energetic Baptist. Supposing we had no other account but the one which is now immediately before us, we should have no conception approaching completeness of the work which John did in his short day. It is so that all preacher's suffer. Let us go and inquire of those who have heard John the Baptist preach, and listen what reports they give of this wonderful man. Have you heard this new preacher deliver a discourse—the man whose raiment is of camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins? "Yes," is the reply, "we have heard him preach." What do you think of him? "He is a harsh man, his voice grates, he utters austere words." What did you hear him say? "We heard him call the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers." He did not call the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers to their faces, did he? "Yes." Then we do not care to hear so fierce a preacher.

Ask others. Have you heard John the Baptist preach? "Yes." What say you about him? "Savage, terrible; do not go near him, he will offend, he will affright you." Why? you say. Can you tell us anything you have heard him say? "Yes, we heard him say, 'The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire; and after that he said it was an unquenchable fire.'" Then he is not the kind of preacher that would suit us: we like the gentle and the quiet, the contemplative, the almost silent: above all things we love the pathetic and the soothing—so we shall not go to hear this Jordan-preacher.

But here are others coming from the sermon: have you heard him preach? "Yes." What said he? "He said there was One coming, whose fan was in his hand, and he would thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into the garner, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

All these three reports concur: they all represent John the Baptist as a fierce, objurgatory preacher. His lips are iron-bound, his voice is like a shock of tempest, and there is no gentleness in his heart. By these fierce utterances he disproves his claim to be the herald of the man you expect.

There the report of this great preacher might end. Would you have a true conception of his marvellous power from the report which Matthew gives in this chapter? You must collate the other evangelists and put the

story together, piece by piece, until you get its wholeness. This same John the Baptist said the tenderest thing that ever fell from human lips. The man who said, "Vipers—axe—fire—fan" said the most touching words that ever fell on the bruised and expectant heart of men. I have noticed that to be the case so frequently—that the men who can denounce the age with so fierce an accent, can bless the age with its softest and sweetest benedictions. I have noticed that the humorist is the master of pathos. I have observed that the man who is most fierce against iniquity can also be the most sympathetic with weakness and sorrow.

Now having heard the three reports about John, let us wait a few days and then inquire again. Let us suppose those few days to have elapsed, and here is a party coming from listening to the Baptist. Let us inquire—have you heard the Baptist preach? "Yes." What think ye of him? "He 'hath broken our hearts." What, has he said anything about viper, and fire, and axe, and fan? "Nothing." What then did he say? He cannot have spoken any gentle thing: gentle things would not become that fierce mouth. What said he? Now listen to the reply, and tell me if this does not reveal the character of the Baptist in its roundness. He said, looking upon One who was within sight, and pointing to him, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." What, did the man who said, "Viper, axe, fire, fan, purge the floor"—did he say, "Behold the Lamb of God"? "Yes." Then he preached the only sermon worth preaching.

IX.

SYMPATHY, INAUGURATION, AND SYMPATHY—PROVIDENCE BOTH SLOW AND SWIFT—REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER—THE TRUE LAW OF DEVELOPMENT—THE TRUE BAPTISM.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, since the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee, thou canst make it light in our hearts, even though they be under a great cloud and gloom. Thou delightest to come into the soul of man, and to shed upon it all the brightness and beauty of heavenly morning. So do thou now come unto our hearts and create all the peace of thy sacred Sabbath, and give thy pilgrims rest. Very good art thou, and as for thy truth, it is more sure than the sun. Very tender, beyond all we know of pity, is the Lord, and he is our Father, and on him do we rest in the time of sore trouble and great fear. For a long time we turned our eyes away from thee as though we knew thee not, and then suddenly coming upon great woe, behold our hearts turned their eyes towards the heavens to search for him who reigns and rules over all. Thou dost receive thy prodigals every day, yea, in the night time dost thou open the door of thy house to let thy wanderers in. We are all thine, though we have spoken against thee; we bear thine image, though our hand has been thrust into thy face: we are still thy children, though we have ruined every faculty and wasted our inheritance, and are no more worthy to be called thy sons. So great is thy love, so all-forgiving is thy spirit: we come to thee now without any defence or excuse, assured by the very breath of thy gospel that we shall be received, even with joyfulness, in the courts of our Father's house.

We have done wickedly: we bring back no commandment to thy throne that we have kept: we dare not stand upon our virtue and innocence and ask for thine inquiry. We are evil and we have done evil, and we are witnesses against ourselves, and the day is too short to hear the testimony of our self-accusation. But great is the mercy of the Lord, and full is his everlasting love, and ready to reply in his yielding and clement heart, seeing that we do come in the appointed way, and breathe our penitential prayer at the foot of the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We speak in his sweet great name, it is a name to sinners dear, it was created for the use of sinners—verily it is their name, a rock in which they hide, a sun from which they expect their light, a sanctuary of delight and a pledge of power.

We entreat thee to hear our praises when we bless thee for all thy loving care. The fire has not gone out at home, the sick one is still with us, and a new gleam of hope lights up the chamber of gloom. Thou hast kept our roof over our head, and the snow has melted without drenching us. Behold thou hast kept the winter outside, and on the hearthstone hast thou set the flower of summer. Our table thou dost spread with a liberal hand, thou dost make our bed, and soften our pillow, and send sweet sleep to give us renewal of strength. All our friends are with us still,

cheerful and glad, and touching us with the contagion of a rich sympathy, blessing us with the comfort of high fellowship, and giving gladness to the earth. Our reasoning faculties thou hast spared unto us, we are men at liberty and not in prison, we are bound to one another by the bonds of love, no fetter falls upon our limbs. What, then, shall we render unto the Lord for all his personal and social blessings unto us? We will lift high our hymn of praise, and bless the Lord with a solemn psalm.

Beyond all this, thou hast made our hearts rich with grace : before our eyes thou hast set a bright hope, thou hast put into our souls the comfort of thy Son, thou hast given us a Saviour, name high above all others, sweet beyond all names we know. May he be unto us Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of peace, all and in all, what we need, what we cannot live without, assurance upon assurance, as grace upon grace, until our confidence becomes a high triumph.

We bless thee for thy written word, placed before us in our mother tongue : we thank thee for ability to read it, each man for himself. As we read, do thou explain : then shall thy word be written upon the page before us, and upon the inner page of our loving hearts.

Hear all special praises and incline thine ear to all particular complaints. Do thou give rest unto the weary, and hope to the sad, and a new beginning to those who have spoiled all the past. Lift us into high ecstasy because of the renewal of our life and hope in Christ Jesus, and as the year closes around us, and bids us pensively Farewell, may we rise in the spirit of devotion and consecration, and attach ourselves to thy cause by broad and honourable vows.

Good Lord, hear us : let thy pity be greater than our sin, let the cross of Jesus Christ rise infinitely beyond the gloom of our distress, and give us assurance of pardon, purity, and heaven. Amen.

MATTHEW iii. 13-17.

13. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14. But John forbade (sought to hinder) him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me ?

15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now (for the present), for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16. And Jesus when he was baptized went straightway out of the water, and lo the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him :

17. And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

THERE is one point upon which we are all agreed—namely, that the baptism of Jesus Christ could not be a baptism unto *repentance*. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." He was without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, the very Son of God, pure as the bosom on which he rested and out of which he came. We must, therefore, find other reasons than that of repentance for this baptism of the Saviour of the world. John must enlarge his own conception of the baptism which he came to administer. He had used the word Repent ; now a new word was to be attached to his baptism, and an infinitely older and larger word,

What man amongst us is there who knows the exact measure of his work? Yet, for the sake of convenience, every one of us has a name by which he designates his ministry. John, for example, called his service a baptism unto repentance. But there came one unto him who said, "The other word which enlarges your service to its true proportion, and indicates its high intent and purport, is—Righteousness." John thought his ministry a negative one: Jesus Christ taught him that his baptism was positive as well as negative, a baptism unto righteousness or in accordance with the spirit of righteousness, as well as a baptism unto repentance.

This baptism of Christ was a baptism of *sympathy*. Sympathy means feeling with, having a common pathos or feeling, emotion, or passion, and he, the Saviour, was in all points made like unto his brethren, that in all points he might have a fellow-feeling, a kindred passion: that there might be no tone in all the gamut of their life's utterance to which he could not respond, giving it a counterpart, a fulfilment, a higher emphasis, a keener and truer accent. Jesus Christ identified himself with all the dispensations of providence; he was the spirit of the prophets, and now he came into this baptism of John. When he expounded the Scriptures he began at Moses—he could not have begun earlier—and he expounded them to those who listened to him—what was written in Moses, in the prophets, and in the Psalms; and, having been present in all these dispensations or varieties of the divine mood in relation to the children of men, was he to be absent only from the baptism of John? So he accepted that baptism, not because the word Repentance was associated with it, but because it also extended itself by subtle processes wholly unknown to the Baptist himself—to *Righteousness*.

It was a baptism of *inauguration* and a baptism of *approval*; John was hereby sealed as a witness and messenger of God. By this act Jesus Christ said, "John is no adventurer, and his baptism is no mere sensation of the passing hour. It goes back to the decree and purpose of God, it looks forward to the infinite gospel which it holds," and thus John himself was sealed, approved, and crowned in this very act of humble service performed by the Son of God. It was, I repeat, a baptism of inauguration. Jesus Christ was not in the sacerdotal line, though in the line royal: he came to be the Priest of the universe, having from eternity been its King, now he was introduced or inaugurated into his high-priestly office.

How little we know what we are doing when we baptize any life. We speak of repentance and cleansing as the meaning and purport of baptism, and sometimes we are baptizing kings and priests, and we know it not. The possibility that we may be thus inaugurating to high office and noble position some human life should throw over our whole service a tender and hopeful solemnity. You cannot tell who is under your influence: it may be a king, a priest, a deliverer. You thought your work was a preliminary

one, you called yourself an elementary teacher, you said, in humble self-deprecation, "I am but a pioneer, I am only a forerunner, my name is a herald and nothing more, and I give introductory lessons, and cannot proceed to the higher learning: I am only a precursor, and nothing more." You limited yourself too much. John thought he was a crying voice, whereas it was appointed of God that he should inaugurate to his priestly office the Saviour of the world.

Thus the lesser may be concerned in the service of the greater. "I have need to be baptized of thee." If a man does not feel his own need of baptism he is unworthy of administering the rite in any of its higher senses to the humblest creature that ever was presented at the altar. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" We know the meaning of this in other ranges of thinking. A minister sometimes sees before him persons to whom intellectually he is but slave and minister, and he says, "I have need to be intellectually elevated and illuminated by thee, and comest thou to me?" Yet the coming is perfectly right, for this kingdom of Christ is not a merely intellectual school, it is a school in which intellect has to sit down and humble itself, and patiently wait for the illumining revelation which is shed from Heaven. We do not sit here in our cleverness and grandeur and intellectual influence, but in our moral nakedness and necessity, in our spiritual simplicity and childlikeness, waiting not for man but for God, and for man only in so far as he is the medium on which the infinite silence breaks into momentary speech for the teaching and comforting of the human heart.

Thus, too, God puts himself under his own laws. "The laws of nature" is a mood of God, is but another expression for God himself. Do not speak of laws of nature as if they were somewhat independent of God. They are God, they are God in motion, God made visible, God made audible, God coming down in wondrous condescension so far into our region, and thinking that we can in some degree trace him, and identify him, and judge him. Thus Jesus Christ came unto the baptism of John. It was to him a baptism of sympathy, a baptism of approval, a baptism of inauguration, a stooping of the divine so as to take up its own laws and exemplify its own purposes.

REVIEW OF THE CHAPTER.

Now, looking at the third chapter as a whole, having already gone through it in detail, we seem to see in this brief chapter *the history of a whole dispensation*, the dispensation of John the Baptist. It begins and ends in these seventeen short verses. In this chapter I read, "Then cometh JOHN," and I also read, "Then cometh JESUS." God thus condenses much into brief space. Sometimes he takes a long line, and we say

he has gone into a far country, and we know not when he will return. Sometimes he seems to work with urgency and suddenness, and in a moment to begin and complete a whole dispensation. He is not to be measured by our lines or described by our terms : we cannot tell what he will do—he may take ages countless in which to build a rock, he may take a short night-time in which to begin and complete a whole dispensation of his providence. Thus he baffles all our statistical tables. We have no calculus by which we can tell when he will come, or where he will be at a given period ; we cannot take him within our sweep and line. He loves to baffle the ingenuity of man. We have reduced everything now to a law of averages, but God stands out of our reckoning, and no man can say whether he will not come to-night to judge the world. Thus are we kept in continual expectation, thus there is ever near us a ghost that alarms or comforts, according to the mood of our heart. Let us learn that our business is to rest in the Lord and to wait patiently for him, so that whether he come to-night or do not come for long ages yet to elapse, we may be found doing our little best, cultivating our tiny corner, watching, waiting, praying, hoping, suffering with a hero's confidence, toiling with a son's delight, and then, come when he may, it will be summer for our souls, release and freedom for all that makes us mean.

Looking again at this chapter as a whole, we see that it introduces a new name into human history. May I pause a moment to ask you what that new name is? As we have read the chapter over several times together, did you hear one name that struck you as music strikes an attentive soul? It is a short name, it is—Son. "This is my beloved Son." We have made ourselves so familiar with that word that we read it as though it did not mark a new epoch in human history ; but if we could have read the Bible through at one long sitting, we should have seen that the line of development moves in this form, Man—Servant—Prophet—Messenger—Son. Last of all he sent his Son also. It is infinitely exciting to see how these new words came into human speech. All the time we felt something was wanting : *Man* was a great name, *Servant* a high office, *Prophet* a marvellous function, *Messenger* a high ministry—SON takes them up and rounds them into completeness, and lights them with ineffable splendour.

The divine movement is always climacteric, the divine progress is an *ascension*. God does not begin with Son and work down to servant, nor with man and work down to some insignificant molecule : he begins at the other end, and always the better day is to come. Prophecy meant that the day of light was to dawn upon the hills and valleys of time, and that music was to take the place of groaning. That is the thread or line of the Bible, and because it is so I find in that very movement of ascension a confirmatory illustration, not to say an original and complete argument, on behalf of the divinity and authority of the Book which we worship as divinely inspired and final in its moral revelations.

Then, looking again at the chapter as a whole, we see that it completes what other dispensations only began. The proofs upon this point are several and brilliant. What is the first word we hear in connection with human history, or with the formation of man? It is *make*. "Let us make man." In connection with Jesus Christ, "This is my only BEGOTTEN Son." A Creator, a Father, an Artist, a God. Still the line heightens itself in the same direction. What is the description of the character of man in the first instance? *Upright*. God made man upright. What is the word used in connection with the Son? *Beloved*. See how God rises, and how his revelation brightens broadly. Upright—an experiment in moral mechanics: upright—an attitude: upright—negative. Beloved—kindred, sympathetic, approved, complete. It is thus that the Bible grows from root to flower; this is development. We claim that word as a Christian term, we cannot do without it in the church; the whole scheme of the divine administration of human affairs is a development, a progress, an upward marching: see it in the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear: we would have God's Book judged by that law or science of development, and so judged we are brought from Make to Begotten, from Upright to Beloved, and from Very Good to Well Pleased. Hear ye not the same old, rich voice? "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." "Lo, a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In both cases he sets himself in a relation of satisfaction to what is before him. Man, standing there, fashioned in his own image, upright, faultless, inexperienced, with a great destiny to work out—on him is written "Very good." The last outcome of this human growth and mystery stands before him on Jordan's banks, and a voice says "Well pleased," and when God is pleased law is satisfied and grace is triumphant.

Then we come further still, from the *Us* of the creating Trinity to the *My* of the approving Father. Thus in the creation of man we read, "Let *us* make man." In the inauguration of the Son we read, "This is *my* beloved Son." Examine still further, and in other fields and relationships, this suggestion of the continuous, ever-culminating development of the divine purpose, and say if there be not in it a rich fund of spiritual instruction and satisfaction. There has been a divine ideal in the rest towards which God has been slowly moving, through revolution, and war, and distress, and manifold experiences of every human kind, but never did he say "Well pleased" until there stood before him his only begotten Son. Five hundred years before he was not at rest. A century before, his purpose was still a hundred years ahead, but steadily, surely, grandly he moved on, the line now dipping into deep pits, now starting up high hills—still on he moved. You cannot turn God back, though now the ancestral line is lost in a harlot, and now it is put to risk in a wayward king. Still he

moves on, and presently he says, "It is finished: this is my beloved SON."

So shall it be in the culmination and upgathering of all things. Jesus Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy, that shall be destroyed is death, and when death lies below his feet, he will deliver up the kingdom to God and his Father, and God shall be all in all. Haste thee, calm morning—a flame with every colour of beauty, peaceful with the divine benediction—O, come. The old earth is torn with pain and distressed with intolerable pangs—but that morning cometh. Watchman, what of the night? The night cometh, and also the morning. We are in sad case just now. England was never baser in her morals in many public aspects of her history than she is at this moment. She never more foully debased her journalism, or poured out of her history streams more revolting and pestilential. But God is moving on; it is his old movement; he knows every knot in the line, every twist in the road, every difficulty in the path—but if you could see his eye, it never moves from the point he has set before him, and he will bring in all his purposes and decrees, his completed oaths and covenants fulfilled, for his own mouth hath spoken it.

Are we now to bid farewell to John the Baptist? Are you still in John's baptism? He was a burning and a shining light, but you ought to have left him long ago. Are you still down by Jordan's banks, wanting to take the plunge? Verily I say unto you, amongst them that are born of women there hath not appeared a greater than John the Baptist; nevertheless, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. You ought, therefore, to take the step from the initial baptism into the inner and Christian one. You ought to leave the letter and pass into the spirit. You ought now to be able to enjoy the large, calm, sweet liberty of the gospel, and not be bound by ordinances, and observances, and divers ceremonies. We have left these behind us: they were useful in their time, they were elements which God used for the further broadening and illumination of his righteousness, so far as our vision was concerned, but now I know nothing of any ceremony: I have outlived it; if I do anything, it is merely to remind me, merely as a suggestion; not as a necessity, but as a help to some higher spiritual blessing.

Do you say you have been baptized, and therefore you are all right? All the water in all the seas and firmaments of heaven would not cleanse you. Do you say you sit down regularly to the Lord's supper? All the wine in all the vineyards of creation would not contain one drop of blood to you, if you are not already hidden in the very heart of the Son of God. Do you say you regularly come to church and observe religious fasts and festivals? Away with all these externals, if they do not indicate contrition, self-renunciation, trust in a living Christ, identification with the Son

of God. We are not saved by the outward, but by the inward. All the outward is but symbolical—the inward baptism is a shedding abroad in the heart of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord's peace be in our souls, and the Lord help us to see beyond the letter into all the brightness and beauty of the spirit. "

X.

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST—LIFE ITSELF IS TEMPTATION—THE DEVIL'S
THREE TEMPTATIONS—THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE TEMPTER—THE
DEVIL'S THREE-FOLD KNOCK.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know that thy Word is true, because it is written in our own life, and syllable by syllable we live it out every day. There is in the heart of man an answer to the appeal of thy Book : we know what is meant when we come upon the words sin, temptation, pain, and fear ; we bless thee that we also know the meaning of the words love, grace, pardon—these are thy heart-words, they come with all the yearning of thy spirit, and they cry unto us and make known unto our souls the gospel of thy pity. We bless thee that we have light upon one side of our life, for we do not deserve it : our sin might have surrounded us with infinite night, and left no room for light on all the way that we take. But where sin abounds grace doth much more abound : thou dost answer death by life : where the devil is strong thou art stronger : more are they that be for us than they that be against us. Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ ? There is no arm so strong as thine, there is no wisdom so full of light as is the omniscience of God. As for thy grace, it is deeper than the sea, and thy love is higher than the sun. Thus doth rest come into our hearts and peace alight upon our spirits as a dove from Heaven. Enable us amid all sin and sorrow of every kind to fix our eyes upon the uplifted cross and upon the Son of God, then shall the light thereof break upon us like a morning long delayed, and in our souls there shall be all the comfort of thy peace.

We are here, not to keep silence before thee, but to speak of thy goodness and thy mercy, long continued and never failing. Thy rod and thy staff have comforted us, and thou hast enlarged thy house so that we have found it everywhere, in business, in affliction, in service, in waiting. We would dwell in the house of the Lord for ever and ever, and in his temple would we build our nest, yea, by thine altars would we be found at last, so that death shall be but an entrance into Heaven.

We implore thee to take care of us during our remaining days. Hold thou us up and we shall be safe : forsake us not for one instant, for the serpent is vigilant, and the enemy is mighty. Give us the right answer to every temptation, give us the right view of every trial, help us so to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom, give us that holy trust in thy name and grace which no power can shake. May our hearts wait upon God steadfastly, with all the constancy of inviolable love, may we look unto God from whom is all our expectation.

Thou hast shot sore at some of us ; yea, our hearts are full of thine arrows which are drinking our blood. Thou hast darkened the sunniest room in the house. Thou hast taken away our chosen good, thou hast turned upside down our supreme earthly delight, thou hast made havoc in the garden, and the place of flowers hath become a

wild wilderness. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Thou hast dug the grave in the midst of our home, and instead of the turtle, thou hast sent the mocking-bird to taunt us with strange tones. To some of us thou hast given of the very wine of Heaven, yea thy sun hath smiled upon our roof, our basket and our store thou hast blessed, our flocks and herds are a multitude, and our ground brings forth abundantly. The rivers are full of fish and the air dark with birds, and behold our house is set upon a rock, and the south wind breathes through every chamber. The Lord sanctify prosperity unto the prosperous, as well as adversity unto those who sit in trouble. Show us that there is danger on the mountain top as well as in the deep valley.

Thou hast granted unto our children health and strength and beauty, and thou hast filled their mouth with laughter, and their mind with sunny hope and dream. In their tongue is found music and in their feet readiness to obey. The Lord spare their lives, the Lord make them better than their ancestors, the Lord baptize them from the heavens with his benediction day by day till old age shall come.

Look upon us, one and all—upon the old man, weary, hardly knowing why ; upon the little child, glad with a laughter that is never to perish ; upon the busy man with bent back, raking in the dust for that which is of no worth ; upon the man of leisure whose idleness is a trial, upon the silent, broken-hearted mother, who cries over her prodigal child and dare not name his name ; upon those who have little bread and fear to touch it lest it waste ; upon the great man in the fulness of his breadth and power—yea, upon us all, overlooking none, do thou command thine all-enriching blessing, that, according to our years, our weakness, our necessity, and our joy, we may receive of the Lord's hand.

Help us to forgive our enemies : give us a memory that quickly forgets all injuries and a recollection that clings, with all the tenacity of love, to every deed of kindness and speech of gratitude. The Lord anoint us afresh to his work, the Lord pity our littlenesses and reckon them not as sins against us, the Lord have mercy upon us according to the fulness of his own grace and the infinite work of our one and only Priest and Saviour. Drive back the enemy, break his teeth, disappoint his expectation, and cover him with shame.

Bless our friends who would sympathise with us and cheer us and speak the word of Heaven to us in earthly imprisonment and darkness, and the Lord be with us till the little tale of our life be all told and make us ready for the green churchyard and for the greener heaven. Amen.

MATTHEW iv. 1-11.

1. Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

3. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple.

6. And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down ; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee : and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ;

9. And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan ; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

“THEN.” That word indicates a point of time. It will be interesting to fix that point with some definiteness. We like to know under what circumstances great events transpire. Sometimes we want to know not only the fact, but the atmosphere which surrounded it. You do not see any event in its proper altitude, relationship and colour, until you take in the circumstances leading up to it or surrounding it. When therefore I read, “*Then* was Jesus led up,” my mind anxiously inquires, When? Herod wanted to know what time the star appeared ; what wonder if we want to know what time the devil appeared? To find the answer to this inquiry you must go back to the chapter whose exposition we have just completed. “Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him : and lo, a voice saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Then* was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” Such are the violent alternations of human experience, baptized and tempted, approved of God and handed over to the devil, standing with a grand inaugural sign upon our heads on the river’s bank and then driven as with whips and scourges into the wilderness to fight life’s determining battle.

Do not question the validity of your baptism because it was succeeded by a fierce temptation. Do not say you must have been mistaken when you thought the dove descended from heaven and alighted upon you, otherwise you could never have been subjected to this succession of thunder-storms. Read the life of your Lord and Master, and find from that life that our relationships to God seem, in their outward aspects, to change suddenly and even vitally. You are a son of God, standing on the bank of the river, and you are just as much a son of God when tormented and vexed by all the forces of hell in the wilderness. Your sonship does not depend upon your moods and feelings. You are a child of God, whatever may be your momentary relationship, either to Heaven, earth, or hell. God is not variable, his elections are not so many opportunities of recalling his decrees. Be sure of your adoption into the family of God, and then leave yourselves to be operated upon by all the discipline which is of heavenly appointment, for it works only to the maturing and the cleansing of your soul, and the ripening and sanctification of your redeemed powers.

Jesus Christ was a son when the dove alighted upon him, and he was a son when the devil set his whole force of genius and subtlety to bear upon the citadel of his faith.

Cheer thee, then, despondent soul, for God can make the wilderness blossom as the rose.

“Then was Jesus led up.” We speak sometimes of temptation as if it were an accident of life : we forget the words “led up.” These words indicate that temptation is part of a plan, it is a step in the succession to a better life. Sometimes we delude ourselves with the foolish imagination that if we step very softly, we shall get past the serpent’s nest without the serpent hearing us, we shall elude the devil, we shall play a trick upon him, and when we are miles off we will laugh at him as an enemy that overslept himself, whose leaden ears were sealed in sleep, so that he did not hear us when we passed him in velvet slippers. Take no such mean and unworthy view of life. Life itself is temptation. To *be*, is to be nearly lost. To be here at all is to be in the devil’s hands, in senses which will appear as the exposition advances.

Understand that you *have* to be tempted. The wilderness is not a sphere lying a thousand miles from your course, into which you may go if you are disposed to undertake perilous adventure. Your eye is fixed on Heaven, and right across, from sea to sea, lies the wilderness, and you cannot escape it. I do not speak of wildernesses and temptations and devils as if they were parts of a universe over which God had put imperfect control. The Lord sitteth upon the circle of the earth and upon the very height of Heaven, and the devil is his slave, chained with iron and with bits in his savage mouth, and beyond his chain he cannot go. Do not speak with bated breath to me about this matter of temptation, as if it were possible for me to sneak into Heaven. I must be assailed, tried, tormented, vexed, thrown down, battered, stamped on, and if I have not passed through experiences of this kind, the whole priesthood of Christ has been lost upon me, and if there be no experiences of this kind to pass through, then the cross of Christ is an exaggeration of remedial measures, and there was no need for the heart of the Son of God to burst in pity or in sacrifice. Count it no strange thing when temptations befall you ; to be finite is to be tempted, to be a fraction instead of a whole number is to have in you the unrest of incompleteness, and the strange restless spirit that says, “Try to complete yourself, for the fraction may become an integer.”

From this point of view, then, temptation is part of the divine scheme. The devil is under the control of God. Why there should have been a devil, I cannot tell ; I only know that we owe the shadow to the light, and I further console myself in moments of impious intellectual ambition with the thought that I am of yesterday and know nothing, and that there is a

time coming for deeper study, for further and completer investigation. These mysteries are not to be solved here and now ; I accept them as mysteries, and I accept them with the less hesitation because they tally with my inmost consciousness, with experiences known to the human heart, altogether apart from religious convictions of this or that particular theological kind.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil,” and when the tempter came to him, he said three things. The tempter has only *three* things to say ; the tempter’s programme is short and shallow ; beyond those three things he has never advanced one step. He is not a genius of infinite resource ; he is not an assailant that may surprise us with dazzling originalities—his temptations are stale, I can weigh them in scales and assign their weight ; I can measure them and tell you their circumference, I know where they begin, and how they operate, and how they close. He, the devil, is not the subtle and ever-fertile genius which we have vainly imagined him to be. He has three great clubs with which he endeavours to smite you ; I can give you their names, their size, and their whole capability.

Let us then hear what the devil said. “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” This was an appeal to immediate necessity. The devil comes to us in a spirit of benevolence ; he shrinks into as little devil as possible and says, “You are hungry ; if I could make bread for you I would, but I am only devil, blamed one, bearing the stigma of the universe ; if I could have brought you bread all this distance I would have done so, but if you are the Son of God, you must have power to work miracles—turn these stones into bread.” The devil addresses himself to the appetite of the moment, to the supreme impulse of the passing time. Whatever you want most, he is willing to supply—at what expense will presently appear.

Observe his benevolence, and observe how harmless was the temptation. It was hardly a temptation at all. What harm could there be in making bread in a moment of hunger ? The suggestion was marked by the most obvious pertinence and excellent good sense. After forty days and forty nights of abstinence, you must be suffering pangs which none can fully understand ; therefore make bread for yourself, and satisfy the importunate and lawful appetite which now maddens you. You know that temptation—you know the voice which softens itself into a tender wheedling and says to you, “There can be at least no harm in this.” And there may be no harm in certain words, in themselves considered, but there may be great harm in accepting the suggestion of the devil. If it were possible for him to preach a gospel to us, there might be infinite risk in accepting it at his lips, for they are pledged with a thousand oaths to do another kind of work, and if he have stolen into this service, he has a purpose in

it approved of his own soul, and therefore which should excite in us suspicion and alarm.

The next thing the enemy said to Christ was, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee." He comes now to develop our faith; he appears with the sacred mission of endeavouring to show us how to become more religious than ever. Was there ever such a devil! He shows us how we may be more pious than we ever hoped or expected to be, by throwing ourselves about, by entering into engagements as pious and all-trusting acrobats. His motto is—Presume upon God, test his strength, bring him the opportunity of showing what he means by his promises. And in levelling this temptation at the heart, he takes care to surround himself by circumstances which might substantially aid his malign purpose. He took Christ to the holy city and set him on a pinnacle of the Temple—surrounded him by external religion in order to persuade him to dethrone an interior loyalty to God. As if the devil had said, "This is the holy city; within its confines God will permit no lapse of his promise to take place. This is the Temple, and a pinnacle of it, and in connection with his own chosen sanctuary, he will allow no spiritual tragedy to take place. Do not suppose I should tempt you to anything evil in this holy city, and whilst we are standing on the topmost point of the most sacred house under the sun!"

This was an appeal to the Son of God to be presumptuous, to force meanings into the divine word which the divine Spirit never intended to convey, to force God into situations which he never intended to be occupied. Do you know the subtlety and force of such suggestions? Do you know what it is for men to get themselves almost purposely into trouble, that they may put the divine word to its fullest stress? Do you know what it is to shut the eyes, to lower the head and to run straight against a granite rock, and then to blame God for not softening it into a cloud through which you could thrust your head with ease? Let those answer the pungent inquiries who are best acquainted with their soul's own history.

The third thing the enemy said, and this ends his programme, was, "All these things—namely, all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them—will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." It was the temptation of bribery; it was the temptation addressed to every instinct which is in every human heart to turn much into more; it was a short and easy method of becoming rich—the direct cut to rulership; it was the simplification of all the intricacies and complexities and difficulties of ordinary life. It was a blade that cut the knot, and made the way short and simple.

Beyond these three things the devil has never got. I pause now to look

at them, with a view of finding in the temptations *the true character of the tempter*. If we are to know a tree by its fruits, so we may know a tempter by his temptations. In very deed the devil has said nothing bad here, taking the mere letter in its littleness. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, and put God to the test. All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Given such evidence, to find out by fair induction what the devil is.

Let us now study the temptations in the light of that inquiry. Let us look at both sides of the wedge. Given the thin end of the wedge, to find out the thick end. That can be easily done with these paragraphs before us, thus. As he would have turned stones into bread, *so he would turn bread into stones*; and that is what he means to do. He begins innocently, benevolently: "Turn these stones into bread;" and having obeyed him in that particular, he makes a precedent of that obedience, and by-and-by he will say, "Now turn this bread into stones." That is what he wants to do with every one of us—wants us to turn our virtues into vices, wants us to turn our prayers into presumptions, wants us to turn our religion into profanity and blasphemy. No worth of character deters him; he would take your dear little child and make an imp of his own of that beautiful soul; he would take all the bread of heaven and make a stone of it; he would diabolize the very Deity himself. That is the thick end of the wedge. He believes in processes of transformation; but his is a transformation that operates in both ways—namely, turning stones into bread and turning bread into stones. Beautiful soul, with thy high dreams and sacred purposes and noble impulses, the devil would turn all these high excitements and forces of thine into ministries which would serve his own kingdom.

Then with regard to the next temptation. As he would have risked a life on the pretence of trusting God, *so he would risk God on the pretence of saving life*. That is the thick end of the wedge. He is always tempting God to do from his point what he tempted Christ to do from a lower point. He tempted Christ to risk his life to put God's word to the test, he tempts God to save life that he may lose himself. Thus the devil is continually blaming God for the inequalities of human life. He is perpetually sending challenges to heaven, saying, "If thou art almighty, why permit these social monstrosities, rebellions, poverties, wars? If thou art almighty, why not by a fiat put an end to the lake of fire and the whole region of devildom, and reign over a universe uncut by a single grave—unblasted by a single sin?"

This is precisely the temptation which was levelled against the constancy of Christ. Said he to Christ, "Risk yourself to save a life." The infidel has no weapon that he deems longer, stronger, and sharper than this

challenge to God to prove his almightiness by deposing and destroying the devil. If the whole question were to be determined within four-and-twenty hours, if God's eternity were an affair of one round of the clock, there might be some little force in this temptation and blasphemy. But God operates by a long circuit; we cannot tell what he is doing in the secret places of the universe; we hear but a very little of his voice, the full thunder of it would break the listening ear. I am creature, not creator, child of a day, not the inhabitant of eternity, so I would quietly and lovingly wait till God's processes are brought to their culmination.

Look at the third temptation. As the devil offered kingdoms in return for worship, he knows whoever receives the *worship* actually holds the *kingdoms*! This is the subtlest of all the temptations. Give a sentiment for property; bow the knee for a crown; fall down before me and say, "Thou art my God," and I will give thee kingdoms and dominions, vast and innumerable. Who would hesitate to pay down a sentiment for a nation, who would hesitate to change a god, if by a theological transmutation an empire could be purchased? We are cautioned to beware of sentiment; we are told certain objections are sentimental, we are put on our guard against emotion. Religion has been watered down into a sentiment, and I protest against the infamous dilution. Religion is a conviction, an obligation, a constraint of the soul, an allegiance of the faculties which make me man. It is not an evaporating tear, it is not a transient, dying sigh, it is my life, translated into its highest speech.

Observe how the benevolence of the devil is shown at last to be utter selfishness. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." To worship is to give; whom I worship I serve. If I worship God and keep anything back from him, my worship is blasphemy. If I love the cross and hold anything back from its outstretched arms, I am a mocker and no saint. We seek not yours, but you—having *you* we have *yours*! We only give where we love. The benevolence of the devil is a fraud, the generosity of the devil is a lie. My young friend, the devil never gives anything good that he promises; you fall down and worship him, and then call upon him for the kingdoms and he will not give them. Show him the writing, recall the oath, and he will mock thee, and with leering eye, look, and with a mocking, taunting voice, say, "I am not i' th' vein." I challenge any man in the world to show me that he ever got anything good at the hands of the devil.

The three temptations, then, are now before us, and the character of the devil, as suggested by these temptations, is also before us in rough outline. The devil has no other temptations. He appeals to your dominant appetite, he asks you to make God your servant, always to be at your beck and bidding, to give you a good harvest, and a fine income, and plenty to eat and drink and abundance of possessions. He says, "Trust him to

that extent, force him to the keeping of his word, and ask him, if the harvest is bad, what he means by sending you a bad harvest when you were praying for a good one. Tax him to his face with his promises, and compel him to keep them." And then, last of all, he says, "Give up everything for the world, give up your prayers and your hymn-singing, and all your religion, for more mud, and more mud, and more mud—have all the mud and have it for next to nothing, for an inclination of the head, for a bending of the knee, for one loyal remark." No other temptation has Satan to level at your hearts. He may vary the form, he may change the manner and expression, but centrally and substantially his programme is written in this text, and every man can prove it for himself, and know the measure and the force of every syllable of it.

Thus the devil delivers a threefold knock on the door of the heart. What answers Christ will make when he opens the door, we shall see in our next exposition.

XI.

THE ANSWERS OF JESUS CHRIST—LIFE SUSTAINED IN MANY WAYS—TEMPTING FRIENDSHIP—WORSHIP LEADS TO SERVICE—DEFINITION OF SIMPLICITY—THE DEVIL LEAVETH HIM.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou knowest why we are in haste, for our days are but a handful, and our breath is dying in our nostrils. Few and evil have been the days of thy servants, yet hast thou given unto us great mercy and gladness, though we have often turned aside from thy gifts and have not enjoyed the bounty of thy love. Behold our years are hastening away: no man hath hand long enough and strong enough to catch and detain them; they fly away on broad, swift wings, and we cannot tell which way they go, nor can any man find his dead yesterdays. O that men were wise, that they would consider these things, and lend an attentive mind to all thy Word, so that their lives might be founded in wisdom, and rise up in all the brightness of hope. Yet we are foolish before God, and obstinate: with a strange hardness of heart we receive his rain as the barren rock receives it, and return nothing that is beautiful and useful to him. God be merciful unto us sinners, and remember not the past against us as an accusation; give us the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which will lead us to better life, that we may treasure our moments with most miserly care and spend them as men who must give an account of their outlay. Then shall our lives be filled with the beauty of a loving service, and in our very breath there shall be the expectation of a great hope.

We bless thee that we are still in the land of the living, that though the days yet to come may be few and dark, yet we shall spend them here, where the altar is, where the open Bible may be read, where the great cross of Christ rises above all our sin, and where even yet we may know the joy and the liberty of divine salvation.

We bless thee for the year that is now dying, so full of mercy, though full of trouble. Thou hast watched us and tended us night and day, and though our life has been a daily peril and a nightly trouble, yet through all hast thou shown thy presence and given proof of thy government and dominion. The Lord overrule all things to happy ends, the Lord pardon his servants through Jesus Christ, the Priest and Saviour of the world, for every sin that has marred their lives; the Lord accept any sacrifice we have rendered, not as gifts of our own, but as expressions of his inspiration.

We bless thee for all thy tender care and thy loving mercy; and as for thy rod, so long and sharp and heavy, we would endeavour to kiss it, and bless the hand that has dealt the stroke. Wherein thou hast taken away from our eyes the beauty which filled them, hast thou not transplanted the flower to fairer climes? Wherein thou hast dug the grave where we least of all would have it dug, is it not that thou mightest wean our love to things worthy of its fire? Help us to see the divine meaning of our life, and to hide ourselves within the ample purpose of God's

love and wisdom ; may we keep our lives from sin, and our hearts from that aching despair which leaves an open gate for the devil and his angels. May we at all times rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, knowing that we must not tempt him to our rescue, nor bring about our own purpose by deceitful means.

The Lord give cheerfulness of heart to those who have known long sorrow ; the Lord show one small rift in the dark cloud, through which the morning may be seen—yea, the lord be tender with his own comfortableness to those who have been long strangers to ought of joy and high delight.

Enable us all to make better vows and to keep them. Permit us all to see the New Year with a higher courage and a nobler faith in God and in his Son. May our motto be—"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our lord Jesus Christ," and upon the banner of our life may there be written, "For me to live is Christ." And grant unto us thy Holy Spirit, an indwelling guest and friend, to inspire the right thought, to dictate the right word, to show us the right course in life. When the last day comes and the last word is spoken, and the farewell is bidden to a world, by our sin not worth living in, may we have given us an entrance into the city of gardens, the city of light, the mother Jerusalem, the tender one, in whose breast we shall be nursed and nourished for ever. Amen.

MATTHEW IV. I-II. (*continued.*)

WE are speaking now about the temptation of Jesus Christ. Last Sunday morning we considered the temptations, one by one, and promised that we should consider this morning the replies made to them by Jesus Christ.

Referring to a remark I made last Sunday morning, that all things were under the control of an independent and self-existent Being, even the devil himself being included in all things, the question has been asked whether, considering there is one self-existent being, there might not be a possibility of there being two. I think if we look a little attentively into the matter, we shall find that there is only one representative or original of everything. We shall find that there is only one word in human speech : all other words come out of that as the branches and the leaves come out of the root. There is only one verb in all grammar : for the sake of convenience we have, perhaps, a thousand verbs, regular and irregular, but looked at closely we shall find that there is only one verb in all human speech : that is the verb *to be*. All the other verbs come out of it ; no other verb can live without it—all the other verbs are phases and moods and aspects of that—"I am that I am." We shall find that there is only one number, and that number is *One*. Two is an invention of yours. The multiplication table is a trick of man's ; there is only the number one. Two is a guess, a conjecture, something that has to be granted in order that other reckoning may be made, but all these numbers will run round again and come back to—One. There is only one light ; our sun is lighted by some other flame. There is an inner and essential Shekinah in the universe at which all the meaner torches are lighted ; planets and constellations catch their tiny blaze from that central and infinite lustre. There is but one life, God and the devil is part of him. So is man, so is every angel. Mystery of mysteries

—there is but one mystery in the universe, and that is not how the devil came to be, but how God came to be.

These I give as rough indications of lines of thinking, and simply pay this heed to the suggestion which has been thrown out and for which I am thankful. Follow me, if you please, in all these expositions, and assist me by questions, by difficulties, by putting things in my mind that have not occurred to it already. In this way we shall set a thousand lamps around the book and get light from one another. Do not let me teach alone; ask me if I am not wrong, correct me when I am inaccurate, amplify the teaching when it is incomplete. In this way let us be fellow-students of the Holy Word.

Having looked at the temptations one by one, let us now take the same course with regard to the answers. The first answer is, "Man shall not live by bread alone." This is a profound view of life as contrasted with a shallow one. The devil's notion was that life could be sustained only in one way; his short programme was, "Eat and live. Take plenty of bread and refuse to die." That is his narrow conception of this wondrous immortality; he thinks it is something that must be spoon-fed, his notion of it is that if a man have bread enough, what more can he want? And it is thus he befools the world, by asking us to put a loaf in every cupboard, by asking us to fill the house from floor to ceiling with bread: and then we shall have no difficulty in maintaining and prolonging our life. With what a revealing flash must this answer have fallen upon his stupid mind—Man shall not live by bread alone. There are fifty other ways of living: if God so will it, there are ten thousand other ways of living. Man need not receive his life from his body at all, man can suspend his bodily functions and live in another way, if it so please God to sustain him. Do not suppose that God is shut up to one way of keeping our human mechanism going: he could feed us with his breath, sustain us by his word, command our life to grow, and we need not resort to any of the little contrivances which so vex us by their detail to sustain our bodily life.

We have always been thinking that there was but one way of sustaining our breath: man has been victimised and befooled by the delusion, that if he had no bread, he could not live. Jesus Christ comes to enlarge the possibilities of life, to say to you, "Take no care or thought for to-morrow, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink. Life is not a question of drinking or eating. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, put your trust in the Lord and he will feed you, he will find bread for you which the soul can eat." Thus Jesus Christ strikes at the foundation of our mistakes. He does not say, "Whatever you do, make bread enough." He says, "Take no thought about bread at all. Rest in God, serve God, want to do the right, want to be the good, and all these things shall be added to you." The true notion of the text is that God has innumerable ways of sustaining life,

and that we live, not because we eat, but because God wills that we live. Your bread is a secondary cause, or a transient occasion, it explains next to nothing : you live not because you have had a sufficiency of bread, but because God's decree has gone forth, and your days are appointed and registered in heaven.

Suppose I should make the meaning a little more lucid, by putting it thus. Man can make bread by one trade alone. You see the mistake there. Man can make bread only in one way of commerce—you laugh at that as a sophism ; you say, "There are a thousand trades by which a man may make bread. Now make that a spiritual conception and carry it up into the highest regions, and you will understand what Jesus Christ meant when he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." Bread does not cover the whole possibility of living, it is the divine will that settles everything : if God mean me to live, you may take away from me all bread, and all the fruits of the earth and the juices thereof, all the rams of Nebaioth and the beasts that browse in the meadows, and you will find me, forty years hence, young, strong, without a wrinkle, without one token of infirmity in my body.

That is the true conception of life. We are misled by any other. We say if we do not make bread we cannot live. That is true only within very small limits, but the limits themselves may be atheistic. I live, not because I baked a loaf yesterday and ate it to-day, but because God *wills* that I should live. Your life is not a keeping up of yourself as the resultant of some cunning contrivance of yours ; your breath is in your nostrils, and God himself keeps it there. When I receive that conception, in all its fullness and poetry, into my soul, I know what Jesus Christ meant when he said, "Take no thought for the morrow : sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "Trust in the Lord, and do good," said an older speaker still, "so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." We shall have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of ; our life shall not then be the vulgar result of bread-eating, but it shall be a mystery to everybody how we live, and live on so little—that is, so little that is measurable ; but he who draws his life from God's heart has more than a little to live on. Thou fool, thy loaf perishes in the handling, God's life seems to grow in the using.

The second answer. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This is a right use of liberty as contrasted with a wrong one. Let us understand the meaning of this word, tempt. Let us put it in this broad fashion—thou shalt not make experiments upon God, thou shalt not set traps for God, thou shalt not put thyself into false relations just in order to try God and to put religion to the test. Do not run into danger for the purpose of being delivered from it. That, I take it, is the practical meaning and application of the word tempt. Perhaps we shall understand it better by

taking a social illustration, for we often see things clearly by means of human analogy.

There are persons who are always tempting our friendship. They do not broadly and lovingly trust it, they do not meet us half-way in joyful and hopeful co-operation, but they continually set little traps by which they may catch us if they can. Have you had acquaintance with such disagreeable persons and their detestable habits? If they are in company, walking with you, they fall a little way behind, just to see if you will look after them. They are always testing you, tempting you, giving you opportunities of showing how much you care for them. They stay away from church just to see whether the minister will miss them. Nice people to have to deal with! They will stay away another Sunday just to see whether the people in the next pew call upon them. That is tempting friendship, putting it to little tests, setting little snares for it to catch it, and then to say, "Now I see just how much you care for me." If you have had experience of such persons, you understand what it is to tempt love, to tempt power, to tempt God.

Jesus Christ says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Do not put thyself into foolish situations in order to draw him forth from his secret tabernacle and to work some mighty wonder for thy deliverance. Do not use him for merely individual ends and purposes, do not fall into a pit, saying, "God will come and deliver me out of this pit, and so reveal his mighty strength in the eyes of all the people." You try rather to give God as little trouble as possible. Work up to the end of your liberty; say to him, "Father, I would come a longer way to meet thee if I could; I will do all in my little power to carry out thy will, to keep myself, to preserve my life from danger. I will not run risks for the sake of bringing thee out of heaven in order to work some mighty demonstration on my behalf in the eyes of the vulgar and the profane." That is true religion, and that is true friendship also. If I am truly your friend I do not set little traps for you. On the contrary, I take the best view of you, I love you, and if there be anything like mystery about your conduct to me, I say the misunderstanding is mine, there is nothing of purposed trial on the other side; I must be more on the alert, and I must co-operate more heartily and sympathetically with my friend. But if I be only your friend in a superficial and momentary sense, then I am always trying you, setting little gins and snares in your road and watching you, and if I am a member of your congregation, I absent myself to see whether you mark my absence, and if I am your minister, I try your love in this small way and that. Shame on us if such be the way in which we bruise the angel of friendship. Let heart meet heart and man meet God, and work with him, and do not put his almightiness to little strains and stresses, which, being interpreted, mean nothing less than an evil heart of unbelief. Work as if you were God, and

trust as though you had no power of your own. Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, but love him and co-operate with him, and be as much to him as you possibly can.

Take the third answer. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." This is constancy in worship as contrasted with caprice and fickleness.

Thou shalt worship. Take that word in opposition to *tempt*. Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, but thou shalt worship him, give him the heart's adoration, the spirit's whole fire of love, without one spark falling elsewhere. Thy religious life should be a concentrated offering, intense as flame. That is what keeps a man right, religiously and theologically. We are not propped up by little clevernesses, mechanical, ecclesiastical, and theological; we are not shored up by some religious mechanism of man's contrivance; we are only right in proportion as our worship is right. If we live in our ideas and syllogisms, if we secure ourselves behind the covert and defence of our own way of stating theological propositions, the very first thunderstorm that comes will carry us away. I am right only when I rightly pray, I am secure only whilst I truly worship, I am delivered from fear of death and hell only in proportion as my fellowship with the Father is intimate and sweet. Ask me to define myself in words, and I say words seem to be but temptations of controversy, propositions are only so many opportunities of contradiction, but worship, deep as the life, silent as the springs of being, mighty as the urgency of love, that it is, and that only, that keeps a man right amid all this swirl and hurry, tumult and danger, of a probationary life.

How is it with us in prayer? I do not ask how it is with us in the mere fluency of sentences: that is often a temptation and a mockery, or may easily become such; but how is it with the desire of the heart, with the outgoing of the soul, with the supreme and inflexible purpose of the will? Do we love God, wait for him, trust in him, believe every syllable he has spoken, and do we know him, not by some trained act of the intellect, but by an inexplicable and ineffable operation of that sympathetic power of the soul which makes us men? I am afraid lest any of us be living a merely intellectually religious life. There is great danger of hiding ourselves behind verbal statements and trusting to formulated faiths: these are both and all useful in their way, but their way goes but a little distance—the only thing that is invincible is love, the only supreme religion is the sacrifice of the broken heart in complete and affectionate trust in the living God.

Not only must there be this worship, but following it and coming out of it there must be service. Thus the text reads, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Religion is not a contemplation only, religion is a service; religion is not a folding of the hands together and an upturning of the eyes to measurable heavens, and a silent

expectation of something that shall fall upon our indolence and act upon our industry—religion is activity, service, sacrifice, devotion, whole-hearted consecration of every power of the life to one object, and if we have not attained that height, let us strive after it with sweet modesty and with burning energy. Let our heart go out in that direction. I should have pity upon a poor wounded traveller whose face was set towards his home, though he could not take one step to it. He says by that action of the face, "I want to be at home, I would God I were there. Sicknes calls me, want implores me, death beckons me : I cannot go, but I can turn my eyes to the old homestead, and look as if I would be there above all other things on earth." We take the will for the deed. It is so with God : if we really purpose in our hearts to serve Him, and if we fail in a great majority of the points which constitute that purpose, yet if our desire be intense and high it will be set down as an accomplished fact.

These, then, are the three answers which Jesus Christ delivered to the devil's temptations. One point before we look at the answers as a whole.

Jesus Christ said, in answer to the devil's quotation of Scripture, "It is written *again*." What is the meaning of that? It is that the Bible is not made to be of one text ; the meaning is that you must compare Scripture with Scripture. It is possible to fasten the mind upon one single line, so as to miss the meaning of the whole revelation of the Bible. We have to compare spiritual things with spiritual—it is written here, and it is written there, and the two writings must be brought together in intelligent, critical, and spiritual comparison. It is written and it is written again, and the one passage must be read in the light of the other. You must have the whole Bible, and not an isolated text, to rest upon. There is a biblical spirit as well as a biblical letter. Is it not possible that some of us have fixed our minds upon some one passage of Scripture that is really torturing us with agony we dare not explain to our chosen minister? Whereas, if it could be pointed out, he might be able to say to us, "It is so written there, but it is written again," and thus the light might come and all the joy of liberty. If there is any man here whose soul is afflicted by one special passage of Scripture, and I can be of any service in showing him other writings which illuminate it, it will be the joy of my life to be of that service to any soul bowed down by such distress.

Looking at the answers as a whole, three things strike me. First of all, they were *written* answers. This is no matter of ready repartee ; this is not a question of the quickness of Christ's intelligence : this is not an unexpected flash of fire by friction that had not been counted upon—this is quotation ; this is rest upon the revealed word ; this is an endorsement of all that was written in the then Holy Scriptures. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. You are not called upon to be geniuses in your conflicts with the devil ; you are only called upon to know your Bibles well.

Where is the man who knows his Bible well? and yet where is there a man in England who has not some portion of the Bible humming in his head, so much so that he thinks he knows it—who when called upon for quotation, round, complete, direct, can give it? What wonder that the devil plays his game successfully with men whose Scripture quotations halt and tremble for very weakness, being uncertain how the words stand, and not knowing whether the point of the sword be the hilt or the hilt the point? Who can fight so, now trying one end and now the other? Let us read the Bible all over again; get it into our hearts as a letter and a spirit—yea, let it dwell in us richly, for as there is but one verb, one number, one light, so there is but one Book—all other books are but broken lights of that. Jesus Christ went directly to the supernatural; he went to revealed truth. It is marvellous that amid all these replies he does not make what we should call an original observation. He quotes, and if you search further into the matter you will find that he quotes—*himself*.

These answers were not only written, but they were simple. There is no deep metaphysic here, which bewilders the head of poor believers, and makes them giddy with exercises of unwonted intricacy, and calling for unwonted intellectual energy. Great answers are always simple, simplicity being understood as the last result of wisdom—not something shallow and superficial, but as the ultimate result of processes which spread over the whole being of God. The whole movement of civilization is towards simplicity: every now and then we startle ourselves by the simplicity of answers which we thought would have been infinitely profound. We had been looking for words six feet long, and lo! all the meaning we wanted was trembling in a word of one syllable, brief and beautiful as a dewdrop when the sun inflames it with tender glory. O, thou groper and seeker after deep things in relation to the kingdom of heaven, thou who dost want to climb up to the skies by some clever staircase of thine own making, know thou that the way is simple in the sense already defined. It expresses God's eternity, and yet it bows itself down to thy littleness and weakness. "It is written"—be that thine answer. "It is written again"—be that thy further reply. Never go to search for keen retort or flashing repartee within thine own genius: the answer is not in thee, it is in God. Strike no match of thine own wit; pluck thy lightnings from the heavens—they never fail.

Then the answers were not only written and simple, they were authoritative. They are not quoted as conjectures, they are not submitted as suggestions. When a man goes into war, he must not take with him a sword that has to be tried, but one that has been tested and approved. God knows exactly what temptations every one of us has to endure, and he has written down for us the exact answer. If we try any other reply, we shall get a retort from the enemy; but if we accumulate God's answers, and hurl them at him, he will leave us, and angels will come and minister unto us.

Let us be thankful that in all these answers Jesus Christ has said nothing that we ourselves are not entitled to say. When the devil tells me that I must live by bread alone, I say, "What a liar! I can live in any way God sees fit to appoint. He is not shut up to one way of keeping man's breath in his nostrils. Thou art a liar!" When the devil says to me, "Do something rash, just for the purpose of testing whether God does love you;" when the devil says to me, as he did to some magazine writer not long ago, "Now let two hospitals be chosen, and in connection with the one there shall be prayer, and in connection with the other there shall be no prayer, and let us see into which of the hospitals the patients get better sooner"—I say, "O, what folly, what tempting of God, what trap-setting, what small experimenting, what neat ways of forming ourselves into an innumerable jury for the purpose of putting the Almighty to the test." Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Providence is not a question of balloting, and snare-setting, and testing and tempting; it is a question of trusting, living in and with God, and knowing that an inch is not an ell, and that a part is not the whole.

I am tempted to tempt God. I want him to bless my wheat-fields. I, speaking out of my folly, say to heaven, "God, if thou wouldst give me, a praying man, a great crop, and starve the fields of that profane person over the road, people would begin to think there is a God in heaven—do it." It is a superficial speech, utterly shallow and narrow, and it is a temptation or unworthy trial of God.

When the devil says to me, "Worship me, and I will give thee the world," then I am entitled to get angry. There is a keener accent in the last answer, "Get thee hence"—the dog was ordered behind. If we could speak with more emphasis we should get a clearer path for our feet, but if we are "if-you-please"-ing the devil, and asking him to be good enough to get out of the way, if we are saying, "By your leave, Satanic majesty, we will go forward," do you suppose he will give us his leave that we may advance? I tell you religion has lost its emphasis, religion has fallen down before conventional moods and standards, and has lost that high accentuation which made its speech heard above the hurling storm. Hear the Blessed One, see his flushed face, hear that new tone in his voice—we have not heard it before in these readings, "Get thee hence!" Speak with keener emphasis, with broader meaning—open thy throat to the fulness of its compass, and let thy words shoot out like cannon balls, and God will give thee victory.

"Then the devil leaveth him," with bowed limbs and shrunken neck, and eyes fastened on the dust, crestfallen, jaw-broken, his head a-swim with a new dizziness, with purpose malignant as hell burning in his heart, but every energy of his being collapsed, made limp, flaccid, his back-bone melted like wax in the fire. He left him. Whether he will return, we shall see as the exposition advances.

XII.

THE TEMPTATION (CONTINUED)—THE COMFORT OF TEMPTATION—THE GRANDEUR OF MAN—THE TEMPTATION, IF—THE ENEMY'S TRUE CHARACTER.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would begin the year in thy strength, and in all the hope of thine infinite grace. Not one day would we live without thee, every morning would we be found at thy gates, and every eventide with a new song upon our lips. This is our purpose, how much greater is thine intent concerning us. Thou hast given us this lifting up of heart: we speak not in view of our own inspiration, our tongue utters what thou hast already told the heart to say. Let thine Amen be greater than our prayer, yea let thine answer overflow the letter of our petition as the waters cover the channels of the sea. From this day forth may we all be thine, may no man call himself his own, may the cross be the object of our love, and the kingdom of Christ the supreme hope of our life. Forgetting the things that are behind, may we press towards the things that are before—better things, higher and altogether greater; by a mighty and daily constraint of the heart may we be drawn onward to the things which are full of God and therefore full of heaven.

We give thee unanimous and unfeigned thanks for all the mercies of the year to which we have said farewell. Within that year we have wedded the bride, and rocked the cradle, and dug the grave; we have heard the birds sing and seen the flowers die, and now it is gone away with the story of our temptation and our sin, our many prayers and our feeble efforts. The Lord help us in the year that is now coming to be nobler in every purpose, more steadfast in every grace: may we be marked in our whole life by a broader and stronger charity, and by a constancy which no wind of temptation can shake. Where there is particular fear, may there be particular help, and if anyone is desiring this night to offer special prayer for special mercies in circumstances critical, full of danger and distress, the Lord hear us on the behalf of such, and send gracious answers of light and hope to suffering children of men.

The Lord hear us in all our prayers, and cause us to love his altar, with a higher affection. The Lord save us from all delusions, all vain notions, all unworthy purposes, and fill us with a consuming desire to know himself and his truth more profoundly. If any man have a quarrel against any, let the quarrel cease just now. If any man have an uncharitable thought about his fellow-man, let the heart be cleansed of that evil thought just now. If any man have consciously done wrong to any fellow-creature, work in him an immediate desire to apologise and repair and repent both towards man and towards God. Wherein our purposes are right, strengthen them every one: wherein our counsel is founded in vanity and marked by feebleness, the Lord turn it upside down and visit us with the darkness of confusion.

The Lord pity us, the Lord forgive us. Our prayer is not of our own utterance,

nor is it offered in our own name. We pray in the name of the Priest, the Intercessor, the One Mediator between God and man. Remembering his cross, his precious blood, his infinite sacrifice, we commit our prayer to his priesthood, and we know the answer will be great and sure. Amen.

THE TEMPTATION (*continued*).

LET me ask your attention for the third time to the record of our Saviour's temptation, which we have just read. Already we have twice assembled around this incident : in the first case making ourselves acquainted with the precise nature of the temptations addressed to our Lord, and in the second instance making ourselves acquainted with the answers which were returned to those subtle and terrific assaults. Our purpose to-night will be limited to the setting forth of certain practical lessons suggested by the conflict, which may apply to ourselves in all the weary strife and painful discipline and all but incessant temptations of our own earthly course.

Shall I startle you very much if I say that there is some *comfort* to be derived even from temptation? Shall I for the moment depart from the usual course of preachers and instead of dwelling on the dark side of temptation, show you how light comes in that black hour? There are times enough in the year when I may seek to afflict you with considerations that pain the soul; what if, for the time being, we get lifted in tenderer mood altogether, and speak light to those who sit in darkness? This is of the Lord's doing and it is as marvellous in our eyes as it is consolatory to our heart.

For example, temptation implies *a measure of goodness* on the part of the man who is tempted. The orchard robber does not go into the orchard in the winter time: he says there is nothing to be gained; why skulk behind the hedge, why watch the doors of the house, why lay plots and schemes for the robbery of this orchard? There is not one particle of fruit to be had upon all these winter-bound branches. The robber of orchards comes in fruit time; it is the fruit that tempts him; it is the fruit that is worth having; he does not want the barren branch, how great and far-reaching soever it may be; he wants the ripening fruit—for that his fingers itch.

Is it not so, in some degree, with regard to the assault of the enemy? There is some *virtue* he would pluck from us, there is some noble temper he would spoil, there is some high desire he would mar, there is some meditated prayer just taking wing for Heaven that he would turn aside. Reflect, then, that your temptations may be, from the diabolical side, but so many indications that you are worth tempting.

Then let us once for all get rid of the delusion that temptation is *sin*. That thought has troubled many an honest heart. A man feels himself

strongly drawn in a wrong direction, and he says, "I am a very bad man." Once let a man's hope in himself through God fail, and he will be the very thing that he fears. The temptation doubles itself in its breadth and momentum by suggesting that itself is sin. The best are the most tempted; we have already seen that in the course of our exposition, when we read these words together, one after the other in sharp succession—"This is my beloved Son. Then was Jesus led up of the spirit to be tempted of the devil." We all remember instances in which the thought that temptation was sin utterly took the sunshine out of our life. You are tempted to take that drink that has ruined you. You say, "I have as good as done it; there is a pull at my heart which wants me to do it, and if I have already drunk it in my heart I may as well drink it with my lips. I have committed my sin spiritually, I may as well perfect it externally." Beware lest you give temptation sharpness, leverage, and the use of all the mechanical powers by considering that temptation is itself sin. Do not say, "What a bad heart I have, or I could not be tempted so;" on the contrary, reason thus—"What a strong enemy I have, how he plagues me, and does he play his game for nothing? Is he laying all his plots and schemes and plans that he may win a rotten straw?" Through the force and urgency and number of your temptations, see the grandest side of your nature. Who wastes his guns on empty citadels? Who wastes his fire in burning up that which is itself valueless for all the purposes of cleansing and purification? In proportion as you are great and noble and heavenly-minded will be the force and persistency of the diabolic assault.

There is yet another streak of comfort in this dreary discipline. The struggle *excites interest in two worlds*. In this great battle you find the devil, you find humanity, and you find angels. The last verse reads, "Then the devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him." We are watched. Seeing then that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses—what then? Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness." Then he will be *alone*. He will be struck at where there is no friend to help him. Not so! Put the first verse and the last together. No man was there, but all God's angels thronged the assaulted Christ. Lord, open our eyes that we may see the reality of things. We think we are alone when all high Heaven is round about us, and every angel is on guard to defend our life and consummate our purpose. We are blind, we have mistaken the ceiling for the sky, and walls of our own building have we mistaken for thine unmeasured horizon. Give us accuracy and farness of vision.

How differently—let us dream a moment, wildly, almost blasphemously—the verse might have finished, namely thus, "Then the devil leaveth him, and behold his angels, black as himself, pitiless as his own

heart, came and dragged him away." O wild dream, nearing the border line of blasphemy, yet not without its wholesome suggestion, for what was impossible in the case of Christ is possible in the case of every one of us, for we are so frail, so short-sighted, so open to seduction and false lure. Shall it be said of me, of you, "Then the devil leaveth him, and sent hounds of hell to drag the wounded soul into the pit. Then the devil having bruised his heart and thrown him down and cast him to the ground with infinite superiority of strength, left him to be fetched home by some hound of hell"? I hit my body in the eye, I blacken both my eyes, I push and thrust sharp knuckles into my eye, lest, having preached to others, I myself become a castaway. What I say unto one I say unto all—Watch. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. We fight not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against forces impalpable and all but irresistible.

I cannot look then at the temptation in this light, without seeing somewhat of *the grandeur of MAN*. Two worlds contend for his possession; the angels want him, and the damned host gnash their teeth upon him and long to devour him. What is he? Some dying insect; some frail, animated dust, some little creature that can be consumed utterly as to his soul as well as to his body, before the moth? It is not so that I read the biblical account of my own nature; the divinity stirs within me, I can utter vast prayers, I can stretch my supplications onward till the stars fall under them, like earth-lamps dimly seen through infinite mists. Do not tell me that I am little and mean and worthless; I know what I am when the devil would give all he has to get me, and when Christ laid down his life that I may never die. Not the metaphysician, not the psychologist, not the philosopher, can take from me by long and weary-winding reasoning my grandeur. I feel it, I know it; when the long-strained argument has ceased its murky and confusing eloquence, I rise and say, "I feel that I am the bearer of the image of the divine." My consciousness cannot be argued down, my vocabulary may be exhausted, my intelligence may be put to shame by the superior knowledge of many a disputant, but when all that can be said on the other side has completed itself in many a weary period, my consciousness rises and says, "Thou art a king's son; claim thine heirship and insist on the possession of thine inheritance." Tell me if you have not had moments of consciousness in which you have forgotten your littleness and have stood out in heroic breadth and grandeur, transformed, your very clothes shining with light and your face aflame with a lustre not thrown upon it from any external lamp.

Thus would I gather comfort from the temptations of life. Doubt yourself if your temptations are *few*. The man who sleeps in a wooden hut, with not one thing of any value whatever upon his person or within his

residence, says, "I hear a good deal of burglaries and felonies of one kind and another, but do you know I have no faith in the rumours. I am never assaulted, I have never seen a burglar, no man ever interferes with me ; I fancy, therefore, that all this talk about the burglarious invasion of houses is folly." Can you account for that man's never having a visit from a burglar? How would you account for his exemption from that social pest? Instantly you would say, "That man has nothing worth taking ; burglars do not waste their time on such, they go where the prey is." So I say to thee, my tempted friend, wearying thyself out with much vivisection and cross-examination of thy poor tortured heart. If the temptations are many, it may be because the possessions are great. Take this view of the assault and strengthen thyself in God.

Beware of the temptation which comes with an IF in its mouth. *If* thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. *If* thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down. Suspicion may be the beginning of ruin. Suspect your sonship and you are undone at once. For a moment begin to wonder if you are really a child of God, and the battle is half won by the enemy. The old divines used to preach the grand and savoury doctrine of assurance. They used to say, faith is the milk, assurance is the cream. With puritanic zeal, but with a divine enthusiasm, they used to urge us to claim all the enjoyment and security of distinct assurance. Have we escaped from their terms and from their theology? Then we have escaped from a rich banquet, that we might feed ourselves upon the empty wind. Recall the great and noble words of Scripture—"Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be ; if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." There is substance in that talk ; it is not a coloured vapour, it is the substance of the soul's distinct recognition of certain divine securities which God has promised never to withdraw from the faithful and loving soul. Can you "Abba, Father," cry? Can you ever with your soul's tenderest trust say, "God is my Father"? Then, never let the devil write his big and hideous *if* upon your faith. Fatherhood like God's does not change with the wind ; this divine relationship is not a question of the barometer ; this acceptance on the part of the divine Father is not a question of your physical sufferings and moods and indigestions and divers infirmities. Remember that you built your house upon a rock, and do not suppose any fog can overthrow it. If you had built the edifice of your life upon the shifting fog it would not have been worth one moment's purchase. If your foundation is right, the air will presently be clear. You know what visitations of fog we have had, and suppose anyone had said to you, "All the great buildings of London are now in imminent danger," you would have smiled at the childish suggestion. Why? Because nothing has interfered with the foundations of those buildings. Fogs break no slates, fogs cannot even

break the glass ; how then should fogs shake the rocks and make the towers totter ?

It is even so with our spiritual life. These temptations and times of depression, sad feeling, low-heartedness, and want of courage, are but the fogs that come for a moment. You are founded on a *rock*, then lift up your heads—the fogs will pass and every star will be found to be firm in its place. As for those of you who serve the devil, let me tell you that you are either under the dominion of God or you are under the dominion of God's enemy. Do not suppose that there is a third master. It is God or mammon. Do not suppose that if you escape religion you escape all service—bondage—you are the slaves of the devil, or you are the slaves of Christ. Let me tell you one or two things about your master. He was once mine and I know him. I have studied his game. I know every move he makes. He has only three moves with their variations on the chess-board of life. He has only *one world* to offer, and he offered it to Christ. "All these things," said he, "will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." *All*—a little ALL ! It appeared great to his eye, as it appears great to our eye, but it is a little all, and how infinitely little it must have appeared to him who made all the worlds ! If you have devised a little light that will shine ten yards further than the light which somebody else has devised, you will have column after column in the newspaper about it, and it will appear a great light. But if you had made one single sunbeam, you would laugh at the greatness of your supposed illustrious flame. If you could see all the solar system and all the outlying stellar universe, circuit beyond circuit, flame beyond flame, and then be called to look at some little jet of man's contrivance, you would smile at the mighty epithets which he applies to its definition. The devil looks upon the world and says "All these things will I give thee" to a Man who made the universe, and stands above it, and sets on the proudest sun the imprint of his footstep. Do not be deceived by nearness and by small proverbs and by immediate possessions. Have bread to eat the world knoweth not of ; have the high acquaintance-ship of God, and then the petty fellowship of earthly princes will dwindle into its proper insignificance.

I will tell you another thing about your master which will make you ashamed of him. He trades upon my *weakness* ; he never comes to me in my strength ; for whenever he sees me a little *wearied*, then he comes with all his force. When I have fasted forty days and forty nights and become conscious of painful hunger, then he slouches up and tells me his little plan for bread-making out of stones. When I feel tired at night, all my energy gone out of me, he comes to me and says, "You could do a great deal better than this, you know, if you left the pulpit and took up with another line of life that I could put you into—why, there is no telling what you might do." And I say, "I do feel tired, I wish I could escape this

weariness." And he says, with pleasant voice, lowered into a soft minor, so dear to true confidence, "I can show you how." The beast never faced me when I was strong, he was afraid of me when the God shone in my face, but whenever he has caught me weak and depressed and sad, with tears in mine eyes, at the grave-side, at the bedside of my dying friend, then he has come to me and said, "I can get you out of all this." Be ashamed of such a coward, disown him, write a better name on your life-banner—he is a coward, a liar, a murderer from the beginning, a separator of brethren, a deceiver, a usurper. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

And as for you, poor soul, barely living, I want a word with you at the opening of this year. You are a misunderstood man; persons come to you and say that you ought not to do this, and ought not to do that, and you know it well enough, and their exhortation is but so much vitriol poured into an open wound. They call you a bad man and they have no hope in you, and everybody has left you now but your mother, and sometimes you think she is going too, but if she goes out at one door she will come back through another. When a man's mother leaves him, no angel can come to minister unto him; he is ready then for the hounds that drag him down. Shall I set myself up against you and boast and triumph over you? No. Why? Because you have been sorely tempted, and I may not have been tempted so sorely. It took you a long time to fall; I might have fallen in half the time: who am I then that I should taunt you and mock you? Be it far from me to practise this kind of reproach—it is the meanest use of morality.

And you have lived a poor, poor life and are next to nothing to look at now from a spiritual point of view, and you are going almost to give up. Don't. The friends around you know what temptations you have fallen into, but as Robert Burns says in one of the sweetest of his poems,

"They know not what's resisted."

We see only *one* aspect of a man's life. When he tumbles flat down in the mud we say, "We always knew it,"—but when he is just going along the road, staggering, drunk but not with wine, almost in hell, they know not what has been resisted. There is one judge and his name is God, and if we do our utmost in his strength, he will count our purposes temples and our desires shall be precious to him as accomplished facts.

XIII.

TEMPTATION PREPARES FOR WORK—THE SCULPTURED BUT USELESS
STONE—THE RESTFULNESS OF OBEDIENCE—SOME TEXTS BEYOND OUR
STRENGTH—GOOD LISTENING.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, if we are remembered by thee, it matters not by whom we are forgotten ; thou dost engrave our names on the palms of thine hands, the walls of Zion are continually before thee, and sooner shall our eyes behold the falling of all that is in thy heavens than we shall see that thou hast forgotten them that trust thee. Whilst thou art mindful of thy children, may thy children be mindful of their Lord. May our right hand forget its cunning, and our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth if we forget Jerusalem, and prefer it not before our chief joy. May we be enabled to utter these things by the intelligence and the ardour of our love. Truly thou hast remembered us in our low estate, thou wert mindful of us before we had returned, and whilst yet we were in the far off wilderness, even then thine eye pitied and thine arm was outstretched in salvation. And now that we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and are enfolded with those that love and follow thee, surely thy remembrance of us will be quicker than ever, and thy tenderness will flow towards us in perpetual fulness.

We have to bless thee for thy gentle care, thy long-suffering, thy great patience. We have outworn our friends, we have tried and vexed with sore distress those who bare us, and behold thy love is greater than our mother's, and thy patience has been without limit. We live in thy long suffering : if thou wert strict to mark iniquities, we could not stand before thee in judgment. Thou dost look upon us in thy Son Jesus Christ, our one priest and our only Saviour, and see in him and through his work ; behold thou dost count us of great value ; yea, thou dost set store by us, as if we were needful to the completion of thy happiness.

The very hairs of our head are all numbered ; thou dost count our steps one by one, our down sitting and our uprising are not too mean to be noticed in Heaven ; thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay thine hand upon us ; thou dost send thine angels to watch our life and to bless us with many benedictions. Thou hast filled our cup, thou hast made our bed, thou hast kept our dwelling-place, thou hast been round about us as a defence of fire. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us ? We are here this day to bow down our heads and to say that we are unprofitable because unclean ; we have come that we might make common confession of sin, and unanimously implore the exercise of thy forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our blessed and infinite Redeemer. Wherein our conscience is oppressed as with a great weight, wherein our life is made gloomy by the infinite darkness of aggravated sin, let the Lord manifest himself towards us in peculiar concern and sympathy, and look upon us through all the work accomplished for us by his Son Christ Jesus. Wherein we have spoiled the week thou didst give us to work in,

let thy pardon come to us. Wherein the days have been blotted by our unskilful hands, wherein we have returned thy gifts perverted and dishonoured, let the Lord be merciful unto us, remembering that we came of the dust, and that we are in ourselves but as a wind that cometh for a little time and then passeth away. The Lord's love be greater than his judgment, and the mercy of the Lord shall be more than all our sin.

We bless thee that our desire is still towards the light ; once we loved darkness, now we pray for the broadening light of the day, that it may be spread over us until the whole sky be filled with its brightness and there be no shadow left, but we stand in the infinite fulness of such glory as our souls can now receive. We bless thee, too, that we care for thy truth, that we look into thy book with wistful eyes and eager heart, desiring to see and to hear what God the Lord will say. Enable us to see the beauty of thy word, to feel the nearness of the sympathy of thy spirit, and may thy revelation destroy all earthly delusions, all foolish prejudices, all narrow conceptions of our own imagining, and may we stand not in our own thinking, but in the breadth and glory of the divine revelation.

We commend one another to thy tender care. Help us to pray for one another, with a full and anxious heart. Thou knowest what we need—we are always needing, our want is daily, our life is a long cry of necessity, and a long moan of pain. So would we always have the Lord's fulness near and the Lord's blessing at hand ; we would not be for one moment without thee, for in that moment would our ruin be wrought. Where there is desire to know thee better, let the light increase in lustre and in breadth ; where there is bitterness of soul on account of sin, let the infinite sweetness of thy forgiving grace be tasted ; where there is a vow to live a nobler life, enable him who took the oath to fulfil it to its letter ; where there is a heart struggling against difficulty, temptation, distress of mind, body, or estate, let the angel of the Lord help the struggler, and bring him into more than victory. Where there is self-conceit, self-trust, consciousness that all that is needed lies within human power, the Lord consume the delusion as with fire from Heaven, and work in every self-righteous heart the spirit of child-like humility, of Christian modesty.

The Lord help us when we need help most. The angel of the Lord be near us when the enemy would come in as a flood, and may the delivering spirit redeem us from despair and set our tried souls again high on the everlasting hills where they will catch all the brightness of the hope that is in God. Pity us when we are proud of ourselves, fight not against us when we give way before thee and fall down in penitence and expectation, and let the light of thy countenance fall upon us—it will never be a burden, it will be a deliverance and a hope. If any man have a quarrel against any, let the quarrel now cease, let the spirit of reconciliation seize the heart from which it has gone in exile. If any man cry unto thee because of a peculiar trial which he cannot put into words, the Lord read his heart and secretly answer his prayer.

Remember the stranger within our gates, the traveller, the man, the woman, far from home, great seas rolling between them and the place they love, the Lord be with such and give to them to feel that this is their Father's house, and by the elevation of Christian fellowship, by the flooding of the soul with all that is Christian and divine, may there be an uplifting above all temporary separation and distress.

The Lord's blessing go beyond us—to the sick chamber, where there is danger, where there is pain, where death has almost taken possession ; to the prison where the prisoner languishes and is being taught the value of moral reflection by his isolation and punishment, to the sea where men are in trouble and in great fear, to the field of battle where the soldier's life is one keen anxiety ; yea, let thy blessing go

the whole earth round, omitting none from its baptism of light, and let the earth feel that it is still in God's hand, yea, in God's heart, the earth that has borne the cross, and shall one day see the throne of the Saviour's glory. Amen.

MATTHEW iv. 12-17.

12. Now when Jesus had heard (and *because* he had heard) that John was cast into prison (at Machærus), he departed into Galilee (by the shortest route, through Samaria).

13. And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim :

14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15. The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles ;

16. The people which sat in darkness saw great light : and to them which sat in the region of the shadow of death light is sprung up.

17. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

THE eleventh verse reads—"Then the devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him ;" and the twelfth verse reads—"Now, when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee." You must not imagine that the events in the eleventh and twelfth verses followed one another in immediate succession. Jesus had been exercising something like an eight months' ministry in Judea, when he heard that John was cast into prison. Still, I cannot but feel that the temptation prepared the great Worker for his marvellous toil. He was in all points tempted like as we are, how otherwise could he have been our Priest and Saviour in every sense of those immeasurable terms? No angel could have preached to me ; he would not have understood me, his language would be unknown, he would have nothing in common with my deepest and most painful experience, he would be altogether above me, too grand and sublime for my spiritual conception ; it was needful that he who was to speak the universal language, should pass under the universal experience. He should know the devil, he should have met him as it were face to face, he should have felt the keenness of his subtlest approaches, and the blow of his heaviest assault. Jesus Christ was thus prepared by temptation to preach the gospel to the world, and indeed to do all the work for the world which he had from eternity undertaken to accomplish.

Men are fitted for work in various ways. Some men are fitted for it by the reading of many books hard and difficult to be understood, others are fitted by a wear and tear that seems to have no expression adequate to itself in human words, a continual vexation of the soul and distress of all its best faculties, so that they come up out of great agonies to speak tender words, and they bring themselves out of the night of intolerable despair to

utter the word of benediction. But no man can be prepared for any deep and vital work in the world who has not gone through the school of the devil. You cannot be taught to preach by reading many books, how long and eloquent soever. You overshoot my life ; I must hear something in your tone which will enable me to identify you as of my own kindred. Now and again there must break from your heart's voice tones and accents which tell me that you too have been in the pit, have been dragged through the lake of fire, and have understood what it is to be almost—gone. He has wonderful influence over me who can pity me in the distresses of my temptation. He who can only make my intellect wonder, touch my imagination with new and flashing lights, has but momentary fascination for me ; I own it, and bid the man farewell ; but he who knows the devil in and out, all the temptations in me, and who has come away from the life-battle feeling that the enemy is no small one, but subtle in suggestion and mighty in influence, and who says to me, "The battle is very heavy, do not underrate it ; your strength will be tried to its very last fibre and throb, but God will help you ; your extremity shall be his opportunity"—then he takes me under his influence, and I yield myself to him and call him, not preacher only, and teacher, wise and true, but friend sympathetic, with whose soul mine has fellowship, and we can go together both in blessed and hopeful union to the common throne of the church, from which is dispensed the blessing which is better than bread, the word which gives the soul immortality.

Have you been fitted for your work ? If so, why are you not doing it ? To be qualified and yet to be idle is to incur the severest displeasure of man and of God. How many more books are you going to read before you begin to speak ? How much longer are you going to study the providence of God amongst the children of men before you begin to open your mouth in witness ? How many more sermons and prayers are you going to hear and endorse, before you begin in the market-place to say, "My scales are kept in Heaven and my standards are set up in the sanctuary of the sky" ? It is time that some of us were proving our fitness by our activity ; sad is the sight of a man qualified, evidently fitted to do certain work, and yet not doing it. We have all heard of that wonderful stone in the quarry out of which Baalbec was builded ; it was a great stone, it was cut out of the rock with great labour, the mason squared it, the sculptor chiselled it, nothing more that the tool could do to it remained to be done, and yet there it lay in the quarry, not lifted to its proper eminence, not set amid its designed surroundings, a gigantic miscarriage, a horrible failure ; fitted, made beautiful, almost speaking in its perfected sculpture, and yet there it was lying with the rubbish, when it might have been shining like a living presence in some magnificent temple.

What is true of that stone is surely true of some of us. We have been

a long time at school, yet we never use our learning for the good of men. We have been much trained in music, yet we do little but mumble in the vocal worship of Almighty God. We have read many books, yet we are silent as the grave. We have passed through many a temptation, but the word of sympathy never falls from our lips. We have proved the vanity of the world and we have never told the young that the world is a gigantic lie and life but an empty wind apart from God and the infinite Saviour Jesus Christ. How much longer therefore shall we be qualified to do much and yet be doing little? How much longer shall we have studied the eloquence which is taught only in the expensive school of experience, and yet shut up our lips in criminal dumbness? Our Saviour Jesus Christ, having been qualified for his work, went to it. Arise, let us go hence.

When Jesus heard that John was cast into prison—cast into prison by Herod, because the Baptist had reproved the ruler for his evil ways—then the work ceased. Shut up the preacher in prison and you will shut up Christ's Church, would seem to be the short and easy method of persons who take superficial views of divine truth. A man is plaguing you with his remonstrances: shut him up in gaol, and there will be an end of your trouble. That would be a fool's speech to make, if ever you did make one. You can shut up the worker, but can you shut up the work? You can silence the individual minister—what is he but a little creature in the presence and in relation to the power of a reigning monarch? But how can you shut up the divine truth? John was cast into prison, but there came a great light. Now, Herod, rattle your gaol-keys, get them all out and shut up the light in gaol. O the mockery, the satire, the instructive sarcasm of the King that reigns over all! John is incarcerated, and the Lord sends a great light over the lands, and bids the kings of the earth shut it up in their dungeons. So it is with the progress of divine truth. A minister dies, but the light increases: the individual speaker comes to the end of his discourse, but there are silent and subtle ministries evermore proceeding with infinite effect to work out the decree and purpose of God. The eloquent thunder ceases, the silent light goes on. This Christian kingdom is a ministry of light; it is a marvellous light, it is a great light, it is impalpable, intangible, immeasurable; it is around us and we cannot touch it; we put out our hands and dash through it, and still it stands there, an angel that fills the whole horizon. Fear not: your great Baptist is mewed up in prison and the axe is being whetted that shall take off his head: the next thing that axe will have to do will be to strike the beams off the sun. Can it perform that deed, or is the axe not yet made that can shatter one ray from the source out of which it falls?

When Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison he departed, that

it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. Can a man not go from one city or province to another, without fulfilling some old and sacred word of prophecy? The answer to that inquiry is "No." Did you come to church to-day by the divine decree? The answer to that inquiry is "Yes." You could not help coming. Do not suppose that we are here by accident. We are here that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. Do not isolate yourself from the great body of history and the great stream of prophecy, and say that you do just what you like. You think you do: it is your delusion, and it will prove in the long run to be a source of unrest and pain to you. Let me feel my connection with all my kind; let me feel that I am in God's hands, and that the bounds of my habitation are fixed; let me feel that my liberty is itself but part of the divine law. Then there will come into my soul a deep rest, a gentle peace, a profound assurance, and though the mountains be removed and carried into the depths of the sea, yet I shall remain at rest in the very heart of God.

There is nothing trifling in your life. As to whether you shall live on this side of the street or that, will be settled for you if you will put yourself quietly into the hand of God. Why do you undertake anything on your own account? Why do you say you will do this or do that, purely of your own suggestion and to carry out some motion of your own will? I will not go out until the Master sends for me, I will tarry in dark Egypt till the angel says, "The way is clear: arise and go": yea, I will sit down in prison until Pharaoh send for me by God's suggestion. Could I talk so I should feel that life were worth living, and as for to-morrow's letters, and difficulties, and fears, and perils, and distresses, I would meet them all after a long night's deep slumber, and they would vanish before my strength. Oh, fussy little fool, a self-manager and self-controller, sit thee down and learn that to obey is better than to be clever, and to wait upon God is sometimes the sublimest genius.

Thus wondrously does the Old Testament overlap the New. Men who are critical upon these matters tell us that some two hundred and sixty times there are references in the New Testament to the Old, and thus the Old and the New overlap and intertwine, and the two Testaments are one revelation, as the morning and the evening are one day. Now and again we see a little into the details of life. This is an instance in point—Jesus arises, leaving Nazareth to dwell in Capernaum, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet. Details vex us; we cannot piece them together and make anything of unity and shape of them; they fall to pieces under our clumsy fingers. Now and again there is a rent, and I see somewhat of the meaning of detail: I see that there is a hand jointing them, articulating them, and behold it is making order out of confusion. Lord, take up all the details of my life: they are exceedingly inco-

herent, and they baffle me ; they sometimes almost make a non-believer of me ; they sometimes arise and fall upon my life altogether as if they would crush it. I bless thee for these little peeps into this inner working of thine, about the hairs of my head, the guiding of my steps, the ordering of my habitation—undertake for me altogether—let me do nothing but in fulfilment of thy providence.

He came and dwelt in Capernaum. Thou art exalted unto heaven, take care lest thou be thrust down into hell. It is an awful and sacred thing to have a good neighbour, to come into contact with a good man, to have amongst us a voice of fire, a teaching of love, a ministry of light. He came and dwelt in Capernaum. He came as the light came into this house this morning, without making any noise, but filling the whole space. He came without noise or cry or tremulous voice, but Capernaum felt that there was a ghost, a spirit, a strange influence within itself, and that Capernaum, if it grow not right up into heaven and be absorbed into Zion, will be thrust down into hell. Our privileges become our judgments.

Zabulon and Nephthalim, Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—are these a mere cluster of words? What, the Gentiles already? His beginnings are like endings, his first words have somewhat of the ripeness and mellow-ness of high climaxes. Already is there flashing even in secondary light some gleam of divine lustre upon the Gentile places of the earth? Does the word *Gentiles* occur so soon in the sacred narrative? We are Gentiles. Whenever we see that word we should say, "There is something about us : what is it?" It is like seeing our name in a foreign book, like opening a work written in a language we cannot understand, and seeing our name broadly in the middle of the page. We are arrested, and we wonder what it means. God's purpose is one that girdles the whole earth: it takes it little by little, but it takes it all in, and the meadow is not jealous because the mountain-tops catch the light first. You have stood on a mountain-top to watch the sun rise—why didn't you stay in the valley? Because you said, "The mountain-top will catch the first light ; let us be, therefore, on the highest possible point." And did the valleys below retire from the earth and say they would never grow any more gardens and meadows, and any more harvests of wheat, because the snowy peaks caught the first blessing and warmed to the earliest kiss? Thou art but a poor reader of history who objectest that the Jews caught the first gleam of the new morning. I would sooner think of yonder sweet blue Lucerne water grumbling and working itself up into gruff noises and tumultuous storms because Pilatus had the first gleam upon his rocky head, or because the snows of the Rhigi blushed with the dawn before the waters of the lake felt its touch. A little more time and that sun will fill the earth, a little more time and this Sun of Righteousness will shoot out his glories until every land shall be bright with the pure lustre of divine truth.

When Jesus heard that John was cast into prison he came to the front. It might have been an excellent reason for departing again into the wilderness to avoid danger. It would have been so had the kingdom which they came to reveal and establish been a kingdom of mere sentiment or a conception of merely and purely intellectual energy. This is how the Christian kingdom has advanced from the first ages until now. The front rank of soldiers all shot—Forward next rank, over the dead bodies! That has been done and is being done, and none can hinder the progress of this divine kingdom, connected as that progress is with a heroism that is not of human inspiration, but of divine beginning and strength. Where there is danger there should be a provocation of courage.

We know nothing about courage now. There are some texts I dare not preach from. Dare I preach from this text—"None of these things move me, yea, I count not my life dear unto me that I may finish the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus"? You will never hear me preach from that text. It would burn like a conscious lie upon my coward lips. These things do move me. I am annoyed by trifles, discouraged by trumpery circumstances of a temporary nature—dare I preach from a hero's words? There have, however, been times in the church when Christians have been heroic. We read in history not more than three hundred years old of Christians who having heard that John was cast into prison went forward to take his place. I was reading only a few days ago some such occurrence. The Christians of one town were all driven into one dungeon; they were gathered together and shut up into one prison, and the executioner came to them and took them out one by one, having first put a muffler over the eyes of the doomed victim. He led him out in the presence of the others to the place of execution, and put a knife through his throat, and leaving him half dead, he took the muffler off and went back for the next, the knife streaming with blood held between his teeth, as he tied the muffler over the eyes of the next victim. And twenty were done so, and forty and sixty, and seventy and eighty-eight, and that human butcher failed, not the Christian heroism. It was so that your liberties were bought. We were redeemed not with corruptible things, but with precious blood, and we sit here to-day, quiet, perhaps indifferent, as the result of human blood. Are we worthy of our traditions? We dare not go out if it is raining, we take offence because of trifles, we leave the work because of some little pique, not worthy of a moment's consideration. Let us get back into the spirit of those traditions which have made the country what it is, as far as it is great and noble and influential for good.

What have we done for our Lord? Of the eighty-eight sufferers it was said that it was well borne by the elder Christians, but when the executioner came to the younger ones they were more timorous. Who wonders? Does the dear young life like to give itself out thus boldly, all at once,

early in the morning? But not a heart fell back. Do not tell me that a kingdom thus begun and thus continued is going to fall. These men did not work through some delusion for which they could give no account; they accepted their fate intelligently, they gave reasons for it, they were not moved by mere delusions, but by arguments which to them were as intellectually complete as they were morally influential.

I would God we had a little more heroism in the church. I ask you younger men and women to come forward and take the places of the elder, who are not cast into prison, but who may be disabled by age, who may be constrained by one uncontrollable circumstance or another to leave the front. They have had a long and useful day, and now they desire to rest, and it is no coward's prayer they pray when they ask for relief if not release. Will you see the place left vacant? Are you content to see great gaps in the ranks of the church? Will you be baptized for the dead? Will you know that it is your turn next? There is a soldier in front of you dying; pluck up your courage in the divine strength, and be ready to take his place. When this spirit returns to the church Herod will be troubled upon his throne, and the time is not far off when he will be consumed by the fire of the Lord.

Jesus began to preach, and he repeated John's sermon. The sermon is one. He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Why, who preached that sermon before? John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, seeing that John was in prison, saw that the sermon should not fail of utterance, and with another voice, that had in it wondrous possibility of intonation and colour, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He *began* to preach. Have we begun to hear? Hearing is an art, listening is not possible except to the attentive soul. Who listens well? Few men. What happens to him who listens well? He hears the Spirit's music.

XIV.

A CRY TO HEAVEN—THE DIVINE CALL TO SERVICE—SUFFERED NOTHING FOR CHRIST—A PICTURE OF CHRIST'S WORLD—MEN WHO PLAY THE SCRUTINEER.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, if thou dost answer us out of thy mercy, who then can tell the measure of thy reply to our prayer and our thanksgiving? Behold, thy love is a sea whose depths have never been searched, and thy mercy is higher than the sky, yea, no man can lay a line upon all the pity and compassion of God. Our life stands in thy goodness, we are surrounded by thy mercy, verily we live and move and have our being in God. Show us that thou art not a God far off, but a God nigh at hand, yea, within us, nearer than our own breath and our own life, without whom, indeed, we could not live. We bless thee for the house of prayer, the place of silence and of song, the house of inspiration, the sanctuary of defence, the place where prayer is wont to be made, and we bless thee for the wide and open way to thy throne through Jesus Christ our only Saviour. We keep that living way, we are all found in it this very moment, so is the moment the sweetest in our life, and there is in it a brightness above the light of the sun, and it is alive with the most sacred and elevating hope.

Thou dost not disappoint the heart of man ; when his soul is lifted up towards thee thou dost bathe it with all the light of heaven's morning, and when his cry rises from his heart to thy throne, thou dost turn it into a sweet hymn, and enrich the heart with all the graciousness of thy love. We have come to thine house to-day with no small expectancy, our hearts are inflamed into a great desire, our tongue is open before thee with speech, demanding in the name of Christ, and not our own, all the promises to be fulfilled ; yea, is ours a violence—we come to take the kingdom of heaven by force. So hast thou allowed us to do, yea, thou hast charged us to seize the gates of thy kingdom and to open them with the violence of importunate love. We bless thee for these heavenly desires, we thank thee for influences that move the heart upwards from the dust and through the stars, and onward to things divine and everlasting. May those noble desires never die, may our life be a continual petition for enlargement and sanctification. We have been content too long to live in the dust and eat its perishing roots ; we would now live in the heavens, and sustain our hearts on God.

We bless thee for all thy Bible of love, wide as the heavens and green as the earth in summer-time, and tender as all the songs of love. We bless thee for that inner revelation of the spirit, that sacred ministry which is beyond all words, and too holy for song. O dwell within us, abide with us, soothe us with all the comforting, stimulate us with all the hopefulness which thou dost bring to bear upon the lives of men who are given to thee wholly, body, soul, and spirit. Turn the discipline of thy rod to the advantage of our souls, save us amid the gathering gloom from the last dark-

ness of despair ; when every earthly prop and hope is given up, do thou grant unto us the defences and assurances of thy sanctuary and thy presence.

Thou knowest us altogether ; the old and the young, the rich and the poor are here, the head hoary with the snows and frosts of many a winter, and the face bright and unwrinkled and young, and the life full of charming hope. Thou knowest those who are in bitterness and sorrow of soul, thou understandest all our life ; we therefore come before thee assured that in Christ Jesus all our wants shall be supplied and our poverty shall become the occasion of our wealth.

The Lord help us to do every good work with earnestness, the Lord work in us a holy dislike and detestation of all evil things, and the Lord grant unto us such answers in the course of his providence to our best desires and holiest vows as shall assure us that the voice of the heart does not fall to the ground.

We would read thy word attentively, we would listen to every tone of thy revelation, as if our soul's best interests depended upon hearing it. Whilst thus we attend thou wilt not withhold the illuminating and confirming spirit, but thou wilt pour out upon us all that we need as zealous and adorning students of thy holy book.

Bless us altogether, those of us who are old friends and old fellow-students of thy word, well known to one another as common suppliants at thy throne, and bless the stranger within our gates, who joins our worship to-day for the first and only time : destroy all feeling of distance and strangeness and exile, and fill his soul with all the light and love of heaven, and thus in the unity of the spirit, with common and undistracted fellowship, may we wait upon God to our soul's profiting.

The Lord speak to the indifferent man and awake him to attention, the Lord rebuke the worldly man whose heart is at this moment far away from thy house though his body is here, and the Lord grant great rich answers of peace and assurance, pardon and love, to those whose best desire is to know the Lord more fully, and to serve him with increasing earnestness and delight. Amen.

MATTHEW iv. 18-25.

18. And Jesus (a considerable time after the temptation), walking by the sea of Galilee (the lake of Gennesareth or Tiberias), saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea : for they were fishers.

19. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets ; and he called them.

22. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

23. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,* and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

24. And his fame went throughout all Syria (the province of which Palestine was

* " Divine service was held in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and also on the second and fifth day of each week. The service consisted in reading the law and the prophets by those who were called upon by the angel of the church, and in prayers offered up by the minister for the people, the people responding ' Amen.' The synagogues were not churches alone. They were also courts of law, in which sentences were both pronounced and executed—' they shall scourge you in their synagogues.' The synagogues were also public schools, and, lastly, the synagogues were the divinity schools or theological college of the Jews." See the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*. In Jerusalem alone there were more than 450 synagogues.

considered a part), and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils (demons), and those which were lunatic (affected by the moon), and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

25. And there followed him great multitudes (plural, on account of the places whence they came) of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis (a group of ten cities), and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.

WE are not to understand that this event took place immediately after our Lord's temptation. A very considerable interval passed between the temptation and this work by the sea of Galilee. Still the incident comes with infinite beauty and suggestiveness after that great crisis in the history of our Lord. Shall we be too fanciful if we think of the places in connection with the events—the quiet river and the sacred baptism, the solitary wilderness and the fierce assault of hell's chief, the busy sea and the call to service? If a painter seeks a background, and if the novelist feels it needful roughly and with the haste of great skill to thrust in a little scenery and landscape in order to throw up the figures, why should we hesitate to connect certain great events in our Lord's life and certain special events in our own life with the peculiar atmosphere in which they were developed—the river and the baptism, the wilderness, silent, solemn, awful, and its temptations, and the sea, never at rest, and its call to labour, heroic sacrifice, noble toil?

We are not to understand that these men never saw Jesus Christ until the day referred to in the text. They knew him perfectly well. Jesus Christ had been preaching and labouring in many places, and these very men sustained the relation of a kind of nominal discipleship to him already. There was in them a wonder, nearly equal to faith, there was in them an expectation which sometimes almost dignified itself into a religion. They knew his person, they knew his voice, they knew somewhat of his claim, and they had seen somewhat of his power. They were already in a sense followers of Christ just as some of you are, in a distant way, gropingly, wonderingly, well inclined towards him, with a mind half set in all the loftiness of the direction which he himself took. They would have been wounded if you had told them they did not care for him, and yet they would have been puzzled if you had asked them why. Why this is just your case; if you could be suddenly and rudely told that you did not care for Christ, you would half resent the impeachment. Yet you are not in the circle wholly and for ever. The time now came when Jesus Christ called these men with a more definite call to service. This was not a call to piety, to religious devotion, in the sense of mere worship. Understand that this was a call to toil, service, work. "I will make you fishers of men." He was not reasoning with the persons referred to, saying, "Give your hearts to God, be good in the truly religious sense of the

word, leave your atheism and worship the true and living God"; it was not an appeal of this kind that was addressed to the fishermen, it was a call to service—"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

There is a time in every life when such a call is addressed to it. Have you heard your call—a ghostly hour in which you heard a voice and could not tell whence it came? You said you were moved, stirred, all but inspired, and you knew not what to make of that strange incident in your life. Did it ever occur to you that it was the voice of Christ? Did you ever give a broadly and sublimely religious interpretation to the ghostly ministries which have affected your thinking and toned your ambition? If you have been looking downward for small interpretations that might be written with a fool's finger in the dry dust, let me now ask you to lift up your eyes and see if the meaning be not found in the stars rather than in the cold stones.

You do not deny the call, but how to carry it out is your difficulty. You have nothing to do with that. Hear this voice and tell me if everything be not in it—"Follow me." That may mean a great tax upon my strength. "Follow me." That may mean a rash adventure. "Follow me." I may not be equal to the occasion. But the call does not end with "Follow me." He who spake these words spake other words which address themselves immediately to every misgiving of the modest heart. The other words are, "I will make you"—as if he had said, "Rely on me for the power, puzzle not yourselves with vain enquiries as to how this following is to be sustained and completed; he who gives the call gives the power." Herein we are entitled to bind Christ to his own promise. We do not start upon a warfare or a race at our own charges. We have come out at the bidding of God, to do God's work and to do it in God's strength—where, then, is your cleverness, your ingenuity, your self-supplying strength? You have none, you need none: your daily bread is in heaven; go for it every morning, live upon God, make yourselves strong with his promises. I know not what I shall do for the next seven years; they will oppress me, they will kill me, they will utterly put an end to me—so would I talk if I were dependent upon my own suggestiveness and fertility of invention. But when Christ says, "I will make you—" he never leaves unfinished any tower that he begins. He has not left any star unrounded, there is no useless rubbish in his universe. I will then even live in him, and wait for his word, and when I am most dumb because of my self-exhaustion, he will be most eloquent if my eyes be lifted up to him in the prayerfulness of a confident expectation.

So many of you are standing back because you think you have to do everything at your own charges. You are afraid you would fail if you went forward to attempt this or that work in the name of Christ. Let me tell you the secret of your fear—you have not read the call right through

from beginning to end. You have heard the words "Follow me"—the most of us only hear parts of sentences; there are very few men that can quote any sentence right through from end to end. They hear the leading word, they forget all the other words that give it perspective and tone and colour. Men hear according to their moral condition; we often hear only what we want to hear; our attention is not of that round and complete kind that takes in the entire statement and weighs it to the utmost syllable and tone.

How are we to know when a divine call has really been addressed to the heart? There are many calls that may only be voices that we should not listen to—how then are we to know when the call does really come down from heaven, ringing with all its music and filled with all its gentle persuasiveness? The text will tell you—the answer is here. Know that your call to service is likely to be a divine vocation if it involve—sacrifice. You want to know no more. "Leave your ship, leave your father, leave your nets, leave your friends, and follow me." A call that summons men to surrender all things in this way is likely to be a healthy and true call.

I never knew God address any call to any human soul that did not involve loss. Anticipating our natural and eager desire to know whether a call is heavenly or earthly, God has always associated with his calls—sacrifice. When Moses was called, he counted it greater honour to follow God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season and to enrich himself with all the riches of Egypt. When Hadad astounded Pharaoh by saying he wanted to go back to Edom, Pharaoh said, "What hast thou lacked?" and the young man said, "Nothing, howbeit in anywise let me go." The Lord had stirred up the heart of Hadad, and Hadad went from Egypt to poor Edom, from rest to battle, from assured and continued prosperity to all the perils and adventures of hazardous war. So through all history—having digressed for a moment from the text now under consideration.

This man Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, left their nets and followed Christ. Have we ever left anything for the Saviour? I have left nothing. He has given me more than I ever gave him—the whole advantage is on my side. If ever he should say to me, "I was sick and in prison, and ye came unto me," I will contradict him to his face. He will have to prove it. There are those of us, perhaps, who think we have given up a good deal for the gospel; I am not of that number—I have given up nothing for the gospel. There have been men who have not counted their lives dear unto them that they might follow and serve Christ. It would be my distress not to follow him. There would be no poorer wretch on all the earth's green surface than I should be were he to dismiss me from his service. I have never been bruised for him. I have had gardens of flowers given to me because I have endeavoured to preach him, and all times of comfortableness and honour: if ever he should say to me,

“Blessed one, because I was an hungered and thou didst give me bread,” if I have not strength to contradict him, I hope I shall have the honesty to hang my head and deny by silence what I would gladly contradict by speech. Let none of us set up as sacrificing anything for Christ—we have never done it.

We observe further, from this incident, that Christ's calls are always to something higher. “I will make you fishers of men.” He gives the broadest interpretation to our daily want. Whatever you are, he spiritually uses as a type of the other service to which he calls you. Are you fishers in the ordinary sense of the term? He comes to you and says, “I will make you fishers of men.” Are you builders of stone and wood? He says, “I will make you builders of a living temple.” Are you servants of masters who pay you? He says, “I will make you servants of the King of kings.” If we have not realized the spiritual side of our earthly vocation, we are still in the outer court, and have much to learn. Oh, ye who heal the body, come, and Christ will show you how to heal the soul. Oh, ye tradesmen, and merchants, and money-turners, come, and he will show you how to make fine gold and imperishable wealth. Accept your present secular position as a type and hint of the call which Christ is addressing to the soul.

So Christ Jesus called men to his ministry, and unless a man is called to his ministry he had better not enter it. I hold that no man is a true minister who is not directly called by Christ. This limits the ministry, but it strengthens it indefinitely. You cannot learn to preach, you cannot learn to expound the spiritual word—all your vocables may be neatly enunciated, you may learn the art of breathing and the art of delivering the voice, but you have not learned on earth, for it is not taught in the schools of men, how to touch the sin-cursed and sin-burdened soul; that art is taught in heaven: there is but one Master, and he never tires.

What is true of the spiritual ministry is true of all the ministries of life. Whatever you are, you will succeed in it only in proportion as Christ has called you to it. Some of you are in wrong positions altogether, you ought never to have begun where you did begin. By providences, over which you had no control, you were turned into wrong lines, and you know it, and your life is a daily pain and a continual sacrifice. After fifty years of age you cannot shift over to the right lines. Make the best of your position. You are like men who are working against the tide, and it is hard work rowing, but inasmuch as you did not enter upon that arduous undertaking of your own conceit or self-will, inasmuch as others are to blame for it more than you are, I now give you good heart, I now cheer you in the name of the merciful One—he knows your distresses and disadvantages, and he will not overlook these when he audits the account of your life.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy,”—what a world he came into! And he knew it before he entered it. If the world had been less damned he need not have come. In these verses you have a picture of the real state of humanity as Jesus Christ found it. I want to go where the people are all well. Tell me where the lepers are, where divers diseases and torments dwell, and where those live who are possessed with devils, and those which are lunatic, and those which have the palsy, and I will flee away. What are terrors to me were attractions to the infinite heart.

This is the real condition of the world in every age—it is a world full of sickness, and disease, and torment, a world in which men are who are possessed with demons, who are moon-struck, and shivering and trembling with humanly incurable palsy. Do we want men of culture to go into such a world—nice, dainty-fingered men who faint at the sight of blood, and shudder if they see a paralytic on the streets? Is that the cruel irony we are going to perpetrate in such a world as this? Let us send down a hundred and fifty nice kid-gloved young men, who never speak above their breath, and who are infinitely gifted in the art of saying nothing in many words. They will return, they will sigh for summer days, and calmer climes, and fairer sights. Alas! “We are adapted to certain classes of people of a more elevated, dignified, and cultured kind.” Fie on thee, my soul, if thou art cursed with a conceit like that. The world is a sick world, a dying world, a mad world, and thy little daintinesses, and prettinesses, and machine-turned sentences will never touch it. The world wants blood; no other price will redeem it. Oh, church of the living God, Zion, Jerusalem, called by a thousand tender names, what art thou doing but running away to pick up flowers when thou shouldst be labouring with coat off, with both hands earnestly at the deliverance and the healing of souls.

If you do not buy the world with blood you will never buy it. There be those who object to the expression, The blood of Christ. We have now refined that very much into the Love of Christ, the Example of Christ, the Sweet Influence of Christ. We are now unwilling to say, The blood of Christ. Why? If I read your human history, I find you have never got anything worth having unless you paid blood for it. How were the slaves redeemed and emancipated? What was laid down on the counter? Blood. Have you your Magna Charta, and do you boast of that large paper? What paid you for it? Blood. Show me in all English

history a single great treasure you have, and I will show you as the signature of its lawful purchase—red blood, heart blood, human blood. Yet, when I come into a church and think of redeemed men, I am told not to mention the word blood, but to substitute for it example, love, sympathy, kindness. No, no. The music is one, the anthem is indivisible, redemption is always by blood, and he who has paid less than blood for any redemption has bought it at the wrong counter and paid for it with counterfeit coin.

Imagine a man coming into such a world as is described in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses to do anything for it merely by way of example. It is by tragedy that we live. Your home life owes all its beauty and dignity to the tragedy which is at the heart of it. If we are ever to impress this age we must do it by something more than dainty words and accurately regulated ecclesiastical mechanism. When we go nearer the city we must weep over it, and when we go into the city we must die for it. Other programmes you may write, but the angels will tear them and scatter them as waste paper upon the mocking winds.

Wondrous is one little word in this twenty-fourth verse. "He healed them,"—as easily as the light fills the firmament, without struggle or noise or huge effort. Mark the infinite ease of the expression, "He healed them." Set that expression beside "He created them, he set them in their places, he rolled the stars along—he healed them." It is part of the same music, omnipotence never fluttered on account of weakness, and never despaired because of miscalculation. What is thy complaint, O heart of man? He will heal thee. Do not go in the detail of complaints, there is but one disease and its short name is—sin. All diseases are but details of that awful fact. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. There is a fountain opened in the house of David for sin. The details are innumerable, the central and vital disease is one.

Jesus Christ's ministry was thus twofold. It was not a literary ministry, it was a philanthropic ministry in the noblest interpretation of that term, a man-loving ministry, a ministry that loved the body and that loved the soul. What are we doing for the body? I know there are great dangers in doing for the body, lest people should become hypocrites. I would rather make a few hypocrites than miss the chance of doing good to one really deserving soul. But who am I that I should set up as scrutineer into real deserts? What are my deserts? None. Shall we pass up to the judgment bar in the official character of scrutineers and say to the great King-Judge, "Lord, I played the part of scrutineer, I examined the credentials of other people, I plucked the mask from the hypocrite's face, I stood nigh to see that no undeserving ones got a crumb from the loaf of charity: what am I to have as a scrutineer?" There are too many scrutineers. I was the other night accosted, walking with my wife, by a poor

creature, who said, "I am very faint, sir." It well became me to play the scrutineer and to say, "All due to her evil behaviour." How dare I say so? Her evil behaviour? If she was faint it was my business to help her to overcome that faintness. I would rather be taken in, deceived, in response to such a petition, than go home and sit down over a smoking supper and applaud myself as a sagacious scrutineer.

I like, as you do perhaps best of all, to help the little children. We say, at all events they cannot be much to blame. And a friend, known to us all, saw two little children the other day, cold—cold—looking into a confectioner's window, the heaven of youth, the paradise of the undisciplined mind. Poor ragged little creatures! And the friend said, "Would you like one of these things?"—"Yes," and two of them were bought, and the one child was too far gone to feel much interest in it,—the other's face glowed with unspeakable delight. How much better it would have been to have played the scrutineer, to have gone into the detail of the case, and to have shown that three generations ago this disease began its cankering work in the family. May God save me from such scrutineering, and may I play the fool a thousand times a day, in giving to the deserving or the undeserving, rather than be so sagacious. I should have nothing this day if the benefits of heaven were given to merit. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil, he sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust. Thy dinner will choke thee to-day if thou dost not eat it with a mouth first opened in gratitude.

This practical ministry of our Saviour has yet to be repeated on a very great scale. We shall be taken in many times; I myself have been more taken in than any living man I ever heard of, and still they are trying to take me in, and I am always going to learn better and never do. Yesterday a letter reached me from a friend who had been much benefited by my ministry, and he asked me to find for him what he calls some large-hearted Christian who will say to him, "Here are forty or fifty pounds for you to commence business with." That is the kind of man who never takes me in, and I never take him in. I am not speaking of persons of that sort; but you know in the Galilee you go through, and the Decapolis and the Jerusalem and the Judea and the Jordan known to you, there are thousands to whom you can minister, and that is part of the Christian vocation as truly as preaching the gospel in any merely literary sense. These are all ministries of Christ—teaching the ignorant, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, teaching the intellect, stirring the ambition to nobler daring, and in all ways fulfilling, completing, glorifying our call from heaven. And then, at the last, "Well done, good and faithful servant." May we all hear that sweet word—we shall need no other heaven.

XV.

CHRIST'S MISSIONARY EXAMPLE—MULTITUDES AND DISCIPLES—CHRIST'S PICTURE OF BLESSEDNESS—A GATE FOR EVERY MAN.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank thee that we have not come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto darkness and tempest and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, a sight so terrible that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake"; but we have come to Mount Zion, the city of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the place made sacred by the presence of our Saviour. We are now about to sit at his feet, that from his gracious lips we may hear the new and larger law. We bless thee that he, too, went up into a mountain, and that his voice was low, tender, gentle, because of our weakness; yea, falling in tender whispers upon the agony of our conscious guilt, and shedding upon us not a lightning to dazzle, but a gentle summer morning, quiet as light and almighty as love.

We bless thee for the enthroned Christ, seated upon the mountain, teaching, lifted up upon the Cross, dying in atoning sacrifice, exalted far above all principalities and powers and names and dominions and ministries at the right hand of God, ruling all things, giving centre and vitality and hope to the great universe. We gather around him this day, with loyal hearts and true, with undivided love, with thankfulness loud and sweet in its utterance, and to him we give the unbroken psalm of adoration and gratitude. O, that we might this day pass away from the earth in all our higher feelings and seize the promised joys, the inmost love, the divine love. Liberate us from the enthrallment of time and sense and all things measurable, and give us liberty in heaven to enjoy, by exquisite foretaste, all the banquet thou hast provided for our eternal nourishment. We bless thee for this stairway up to heaven, this lower sanctuary, this outer porch and court of the great temple. Whilst we are here may we learn much of thy law, and study to the enlightenment of our mind and the comforting of our heart such of thy doctrines and thy promises as our life most needs to know.

We come with the week's hymn of love; for all the six days gone thou hast been with us—the brightness of our morning, the star of our night. Thou hast protected our roof, and our door and our windows; thou hast made our bed, and enkindled our fire and spread our table, and thy rod is an unbroken staff in our hand. Behold us, then, grateful; full of high desire to bless and praise thee, and worthily magnify thy name. Let our weakness become strength, let our infirmity add pathos to the sacrifice which is thereby made incomplete; may our very sin endear thee to us by reason of our contrition and repentance. The old man and the young man, the mother and the child, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, are all here for one sacred purpose, with hearts beating steadily to one offering of ardent love. Surely when thou passest through the heavens and lookest down upon the earth, thou wilt not forget the places where thy people meet to pray. Send a special

blessing upon every congregated host assembled to sing thy praise and wait upon thy footstool, and give us this day a baptism gentle as dew, ardent as fire, bright as light, and let us henceforward be thine by a deeper consecration.

Hear the voice of those who to-day are uttering good words for the future. They would live better than ever, they would begin anew, they would sin no more; their hearts are in high mood of expectation; they hate the past wherein it was guilty, and they would give thee the future unstained by sin. Hear their vow, and whilst they utter it in all sincerity, minister unto them the grace which will enable them to fulfil it. The Lord knows how impossible it is for us whilst on earth to be in heaven, yet thou wilt count our holy purposes as holy deeds, and what we would be we shall be in the writing of thy book.

The Lord direct us in all business engagements, in all commercial perplexities, in all honest endeavours to make a livelihood in the sight of society. Prosper our schemes and plans wherein they are inspired by thine own spirit, and give unto us the prosperity which will itself be sanctified as a gift from heaven, and spare us those humiliations which would drive us into hopelessness and despair. May we give our strength to thee, nor withhold our weakness from thine altar. May our whole life be given to thee, an entire gift, unbegrudged, yielded with the whole love of the heart, because of what thou hast done for us.

The Lord be kind unto all for whom we ought to pray—to the old man our father at home, to the sick send messages of consolation, to the poor speak such words as their poverty can understand, to the baffled and afflicted, the bewildered and the panic-stricken, thou knowest what to say, for we are dumb. To the soldier and the sailor, and the stranger far from home, and the prodigal, the unthankful and the evil, the murderer of father and of mother by daily and aggravated sin—send messages from thy house in heaven, thou gentle Father, thou almost Mother. The Lord be kind unto us this day, and set a flame in his house that shall give us illumination not of earth, and grant unto us revelations of truth which will make us glad with holy and grateful surprise. Amen.

MATTHEW v. 1-12.

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“AND seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain.” He has

already been in the river, and walking by the seaside : to-day he goes up into a mountain, and presently we shall have to accompany him in his journeys through cities and towns and villages. Thus, little by little, a place at a time, he will claim and sanctify the whole earth. He was baptized in the river, walking by the seaside he called men to service : this morning he walks up the hill as up a stairway his own hands have fashioned ; presently he will go further and spread his own gospel typically over all the face of the earth. Thus he will do in symbol what he will tell us to do literally, for what other places are there upon the whole globe besides the river, the sea, the mountain, the city, the town, the village, the house ? Thus the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. In the doing and work of our own Saviour he will give us the germ of the missionary idea ; we shall see the people of one town getting round him and saying, "Don't leave us," and he will rise above them and say, "I must preach the gospel in other cities also." Thus, when he comes to wind all up, in the most beneficent climax that ever crowned the eloquence of a lifetime, he will only tell us to expand what he himself began.

He went up into a mountain, into a pulpit not made with hands. I like these weird beginnings. He did not go in conventional methods ; we wait till the church is built : he said the church was not made with hands : wherever there is a sky there is a roof, wherever there is a floor there is a platform, wherever there is a man there is a congregation, wherever there is a human heart there is an opportunity of preaching the kingdom of heaven.

"And when he was set." Did the carpenter's son do what the Rabbis did ? They gathered their robes about them when they sat down in Moses' seat, for the Jewish Rabbi always sat whilst he talked. It was even so that Jesus did on a larger and grander scale. He begins royally : there is a subtle claim of dominion in this very attitude of his ; he does not beg to be heard ; he does not say, "If you please, I shall be glad to mention to you a suggestion or two which have been stirring in mine own heart." He sits, and the mountain gives him hospitality. He fills the mountain, it beseems him like a king's throne. Close your eyes and open the vision of your hearts, and look at him. We go into small buildings, we ask permission to speak in limited synagogues ; why, in the motion of his limbs there is a subtle, strange royalty of mien. When he sits he sits as one who has a right to the mountain, and when he speaks it is as one whose gentle voice fills the spaces like a healing breeze.

"He opened his mouth." The ages had been waiting for the opening of those lips. When some great men amongst us and all over the world open their lips in high places they seem to have the power of making history. Other nations are listening, wondering, hoping, fearing ; when this Man opened his mouth he uttered words which would fill creation, which would be a gospel set in every language ever spoken by mankind, and

easily set in every language. There are tongues into which you cannot drive Milton. Shakespeare must, in many of his utterances, be a stranger for ever to those who have but one tongue, and that not rich in its capacity of utterance. But the words of Jesus Christ go everywhere, and fall into all languages with infinite ease. He speaks of light, love, life, truth, peace, God, home. There cannot be a language without these words having some distinct share in it. He sits down upon every mountain and breathes through every language his most ineffable gospel.

“He taught them.” This is a new word; we have not met with this word before in our reading. When we listened to Jesus Christ before, he was preaching, now he is teaching. The preacher was a herald, a crying voice: “Repent,” said he. The air was startled by the cry. Now he changes the tone: he sits down and teaches, explains, simplifies, draws the listeners into confidence and sympathy with himself, and makes them co-partners of the infinite secret of the divine truth and love.

Do we run after preachers or teachers? Unquestionably after preachers. The teachers of London to-day are talking to half-dozens, the preachers are thronged. Who cares to be taught? How many of us bring our Bible to church and follow the preacher page by page, checking every reference, testing every doctrine, asking for explanations by eager eyes and burning faces? By the trick of an anecdote I will engage to seduce from the wisest teacher in London nine-tenths of his hearers. We are in the anecdotal age: some child’s story would tickle us, while the philosopher’s doctrine would muddle the heads that are nearly lunatic because of the mean and vulgar noises of a mean and vulgar world.

“Saying, Blessed.” That is a new word also. I have not met that word aforetime. What was it that he said when we first heard him? “Repent.” And now he says “Blessed.” There is a high logic in this sequence. Preaching first, then teaching. Repentance first, then inspiration—these are the coherences and minute consistencies, the moral unities which you find all through and through this Christian revelation, which make it not a chaos, but a living world with a living centre.

In this verse I find two classes referred to—multitudes and disciples. Are they not co-ordinate terms? Far from it. How well it would have read, how noble would have been the music, complete as a sphere, had it said—“When he beheld the multitudes he hailed them as disciples and taught them.” Already there begins the division—that terrible distinction which separates man from man, the hearer from the scholar, the inlooker from the inlooker, the particle of a mob from the particle of a family. To which class do we belong? Are we part of the anonymous multitudes, or part of the registered household? We may all be disciples; why should we not be scholars of the one Teacher? Come, let him lure thee—give up all other teachers and hear this teacher sent from God. Lord, open mine ears that I may hear the whole music of thy heaven-unfolding voice.

This discourse was not delivered to the multitudes, it was delivered to the disciples. Some preparation is needed for hearing Christ. Presently he will stand right out in the busy market-place and speak common words to the common heart, but on this mountain he is speaking to a few chosen ones who have a measure, very inadequate, of understanding and appreciation. Why, it requires a little preparation to go into a picture-gallery; how much more to go into a church? When the uninstructed visitor goes into a picture-gallery, he is seized by subjects, not by art. A pleasing face, a sweet child, a loving home, some little pathetic incident touches him. An idealized tree, a landscape made into poetry, he would not see: he does not look for art, he looks for subjects. You require some little preparation for going into a music-hall; how much more for going into God's sanctuary? What pieces are applauded? Listen. Pieces that are subjects again, that mingle easily with the unthinking—the sparkling, the rattling, or the pathetic: pieces that require to be read with the inner eye are lost upon the uninitiated, and it is certain to me, therefore, and it is no wonder, that some preparation should be needed for listening to Jesus Christ.

His very first sentence is a secret which can have no meaning to the vast majority of hearers. What is that first sentence? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What said the preacher you heard this morning? Nothing. Quote me one sentence that he uttered. He began by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Commonplace talk like that; sparkle, brilliance, there was none; he is not worth listening to; he seemed rather weak in his way of speaking, his voice was low, and yet well heard; I expected another kind of voice altogether, and another type of subject, and he began, after all this weary waiting of the listening ages, by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He began by healing broken hearts, he began by comforting those that we want to write off the register, for we are sick of puling and whining and groaning and sighing. He stooped to pick up a broken reed when we thought he would have mounted the stars and passed before us with the wondrous velocity and splendour of the lightning.

The heart needs some preparation to know the meaning of this expression, "the poor in spirit." The expression sounds as if it were simple, and so it is, but it is the simplicity which is a last result. We may have to spend a weary and baffled lifetime before we come into the mystery of this eloquence, "the poor in spirit."

I propose to look at the beatitudes as a whole, and not just now to look at them in detail. The time may come when we shall be able to look at each verse as a single gem: meanwhile my inquiry is, "What was Christ's idea of a blessed life?"

In Christ's idea of a blessed life I find a marvellous union of the divine and the human. Some of the beatitudes look up right away into heaven, others of them look down into all the relations of earth and time. In other words some of the beatitudes are intensely theological, and others are intensely moral and social. Thus in the beatitudes we have a complete representation of the religion which Jesus Christ came to establish and expound, a religion combining the theological with the moral, the doctrinal with the practical, the God and the neighbour: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.

What is our religion? Theological only, or moral? Have we magnificent doctrine and do we pay our debts? Have we splendid intellectual conceptions of the metaphysical constitution of the universe, and do we forgive our enemies? Are we orthodox in all spiritual conception, and do we feed the hungry and clothe the naked? In Christ's religion earth and heaven go together, and there is not a flower that blooms on the green earth that does not owe its beauty to the sun.

In Christ's conception of the blessed life I find many persons mentioned that I did not expect to find referred to, and I find many persons omitted that I expected would have been first spoken of. Let me take the beatitudes as a picture of heaven. Who is in heaven? Blessed are the mighty, for they are in heaven; blessed are the rich, for theirs is the kingdom of glory; blessed are the famous, for theirs are the trumpets of eternity; blessed are the noble, for the angels are their servants. Why, that is not the text. Who is in heaven? The poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. Then, then, perhaps we may be there. Not many mighty, not many noble, not many learned, not many brilliant are called. Then perhaps we may be there. Woman, mother, sister, obscure person, unknown life—you may be there. Who cares to seek such flowers as these? Give me the flowers that flame like fires, and I will call these a worthy garland. Who cares to turn their heads to look back to seek such modest beauty? God does. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

In Christ's conception of the blessed life I find that goodness and reward always go together. Goodness is indeed its own reward. The flower brings its own odour, the light brings its own revelations. The goodness *is* the reward, the prayer *is* the answer. There are persons who say, "You have prayed the prayer, have you got the reply?" Certainly, while we are yet speaking. You do not understand this mystery, you thought there would be a telegram or a man with a four square letter at your door, saying, "Here is the answer." Whatsoever things ye pray for, believe that ye have them, and have them you certainly will. This blessedness, therefore, comes with the condition specified. The poor in spirit

have the kingdom of heaven already, have it of divine gift and divine right. Sometimes we enter into this high experience right fully, we know what it means without any preacher telling us in so many words. There are times when the heart is just alive with heaven. There are seasons when we could crowns despise rather than give up the high rapture or the sweet tenderness of soul which ennobles us. You have been in those occasional moods, and, therefore, I need not further explain or refer to them. If you have not been caught up into that third heaven, I might speak until the night turn into the morning, and you would not catch a tone of this sacred truth.

In Christ's conception of the blessed life I find that even the enemy himself is made a contributor. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Why, he shows us how flowers grow in the night-time, how the wilderness may rejoice and blossom as the rose, how the black devil with sharp teeth and eyes of fire is the servant of the good man, and waits upon him and ministers to his joy. O that we might enter into this meaning, then all things would be ours, life, death, height, depth—our servants would be a multitude, and in that multitude would be found the angels of God.

Now into which verse can I come? Let each man ask for himself. I am not all these eight—which is my little wicket-gate, through which I pass into God's reward? Let me see what choice of gates there is—the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted. Let each scholar ask, "Which is my gate?" There is only one gate that I see here that I ever have any hope of getting in at. I think, perhaps, through that gate I might go. "Blessed are they that hunger." If I cannot get through that gate, I fear all the others are shut.

But there is a gate for all of us—which is yours, my brother? Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, for he that seeketh findeth, and to every one that knocketh it shall be opened. And yet methinks that all the gates somehow interfold, and that if we get through one we shall seem to have gone through all. This is a mystery known only to the heart of the elect.

Concerning these beatitudes two things may be said: first, they can be tested. These are not metaphysical abstractions that no man can lay his hand upon, these are practical truths that every man can test for himself. And the next thing that can be said about them is that the blessings here

promised are already in possession. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven." We do not wait for immortality, we begin it now. We shall not perhaps be the sons of God in ages yet unborn and untold, *we are* the sons of God. We are not to be in heaven a long time after, we are now in heaven—with limitations, but with a deep assurance the world can never shake. Not yet completed there is infinitely more to come and to shine upon us, but whilst we pray we enter heaven by prayer. Whilst we love, we enter heaven by love. When we forgive, we are in heaven.

XVI.

THE CHARACTER OF THE DISCIPLES—THE EFFECT OF ENCOURAGEMENT—
INFLUENCE MAY BE LOST—THE NEED OF CAUTION.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy way concerning us we do not understand : it is enough for us to know that it is thy way. Help us to walk in it step by step, with all patience and hopefulness, knowing that thou wilt bring us at last into a large and quiet place. Thou dost astonish the upright and turn the innocent pale by thy judgments and mysteries, so that we cannot tell what thou doest in the heavens or upon the earth, and when men question us about thee there is no reply upon our lips : we can but say, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. He setteth the mighty upon their heads, and turneth their mansions upside down ; yea, he changeth the channels of the sea and turneth the rivers into a wilderness ; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and from his seat upon the circle of the earth the populations are as grasshoppers. This is the Lord's rule ; yea, it is our Father's reign and sovereignty, and we rest in that, and find ourselves at peace.

We are of yesterday, and know nothing ; we close our eyelids and behold we are blind in a moment, we cannot stretch beyond the length of our arms, we are barred and caged in like lives that are watched ; to-morrow we die, and the third day are we forgotten as if we had never been. It well becometh us, therefore, to hold our peace, to look on in silence, and with religious wonder, and to wait hopefully for the grand last revelation. Make of us what thou wilt. We would be busier, but that comes from our impatience ; we would be more famous and influential, but that is the mischief of our ambition ; so we will withdraw wholly our own counsel and purpose, and we will wait as slaves wait upon their masters, asking thee to give us the liberty of thine own love, and to bind us fast with the loyalty of a love created in our hearts by thyself.

The days flee away ere we can count them one by one ; they cease to be days, they are like flashes in the darkness and are gone instantly. O that we might number them as best we may, with some view of finding the way in wisdom, and making the reckoning as becometh men of understanding. Help us to know the measure of our life, how little it is, a child's tiny span, and our time is as a flying shuttle, as a post hastening on its way, as a shadow that continueth not. So teach us, therefore, in our joys to remember how speedily they fall. May the young be wise as the aged, and the aged be as those who have obtained the venerableness of great experience.

The Lord help us to do our work with both hands, and with our whole head and heart, as if everything depended upon us, and then to leave it as if we did nothing at all. Feed us with thy grace, enrich and nourish us with thy most gracious word ; may thy doctrine distil as the dew, and thy gospel sing to us as an angel, and charm us out of ourselves into thy great service. May thy promises become exhortations, and in the midst of thine exhortations may we hear the voice of benediction.

Let the Lord's pity be poured out upon us as from the very fountain of his heart, and may we know that our life is the object of thy compassion, that thou dost not revile us in the heavens or laugh at us in the distant skies ; but with all mercifulness and pitifulness of heart dost look upon us as those whose days are as a shadow fast fleeing away ; yea, thou hast set up for us the cross—the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, our one Priest, our only Saviour, our infinite, our atoning sacrifice ; in him we see how great we are in thy purpose. Help us to behold his priesthood and to avail ourselves of his loving ministry ; in all our sin and sorrow, in all our daily vexation and passing trouble, may we enter into his heart as men enter into a sanctuary which cannot be violated.

The Lord hear the prayers we cannot speak, the uprisings and motionings of our dumb hearts ; multiply our few words into a great intercession, and let all our utterances be repronounced by our Priest in heaven.

The Lord send messages from his great house to the dwelling-places of those who are ailing, sick, dying, wearying to die, waiting for the angel, longing for some sound of the coming chariot wheels. The Lord send messages to those who are sitting in the gloom of despair, who say they have tried every key upon their girdle and none will fit, who sit down beside barred gates and walls too high to be scaled. The Lord speak his own comforting word to hearts to whom the darkness is a burden, and to whom the night has no star. Preserver of the strangers, take away the loneliness of the stranger's heart, give him to feel in thine house that he is at his Father's table and under his Father's blessing. And grant unto the widow and the orphan, the poor, the lonely, the comfortless, and them that have no helper, some message and assurance that shall recover their heart's hope, and re-establish them in a wise confidence.

The Lord hold us all as if we belonged to him, and draw us nearer his heart the more the tempter assails. Amen.

MATTHEW v. 13-16.

13. Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

THERE are two ways of looking at this portion of the Lord's address. He is speaking to the disciples—that may be inferred from the first verse of the chapter, wherein it says, "When he was set, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught them." Are we to suppose that these disciples referred to were the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and a city set upon a high hill ? Surely not in their merely personal capacity, and in their then condition. Let us take the first view, therefore ; namely, that Jesus Christ is speaking of the Jews, and speaking of them he hesitates not to describe them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set upon a hill. And yet in a very gentle way,

but so broad as to admit of no misapprehension, he intimates that the salt has lost its savour, the light has been put under a bushel, and the conspicuousness of the city has become but the greater shame. The effect of this eaching is to remind men of great calling and election, and of great and appalling declension, and to prepare the way for such remedial and reclaiming measures as were in the purpose and counsel of the Eternal. This was not dust that had become drier, it was not clay that had become harder, it was salt that had lost its savour, light that was in danger of being wholly extinguished. Jesus Christ, therefore, recognising the greatness and the grandeur of the call in which the Jews stood, proceeded in this most gracious and gentle manner to indicate the declension into which they had fallen. That is one view.

Take the other view. Jesus Christ sees in those disciples what his church is to be. Not addressing them in their then intellectual and spiritual condition, but looking forward as men look from the germ to the full fruition, he regarded them as the beginning of his own divine kingdom, and addressing them as such, he described them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city set upon a hill. Both views are, in my opinion, correct. There is enough in each of them to awaken the most solemn reflection, to affect the soul with all the pain of the bitterest humiliation, and to inspire it with all that is most animating in the sacred word. I will take the second view and set it with some breadth before you.

Christ sees the greatest side of our nature, and he addresses that side, because we are more easily and effectually moved by encouragement than by any other influence. Tell a man he is a fool and you cast him into despair. Tell him that he has lost every chance, spoiled every opportunity, neglected all the counsel of heaven, and is no longer worthy of being counted a living creature in God's universe, and possibly you may burden him with all the distress of absolute despair. The effect will be according to the nature of the particular man who is addressed. Jesus Christ never gave us a discouraging view of ourselves whenever he saw us set in any relation to himself, of earnest listening or religious expectation or incipient desire to be wiser and better men. When we stood before him in the full erectness of our own purity, and came before him with a certificate of our own integrity, and requested to be heard upon the basis of our righteousness, he turned upon us the fury of the east wind, and banished us from his presence as men to whom he had nothing to say. Whenever we grouped ourselves around him and said we would listen with reverence and with religious expectation to what he had to say, then he opened the kingdom of heaven, and not until our capacity was surcharged did he withdraw his gracious and redeeming revelations of truth.

This is the great law of human teaching. If you want your boy to be a gentleman, do not begin by treating him as an invincible and incurable

boor. I wait until that lesson gets right down into your apprehension. If you want to encourage your scholars in your Sunday-school or your scholastic establishment, begin by treating them as young philosophers. Give them credit for as much as you possibly can—by so doing you will cast them upon themselves in serious reflection, and with some anxiety they will endeavour to respond to the breadth, the sympathy, and the nobleness of your estimation of their capacity and diligence. If you want any man to do his best, trust him with considerable responsibility. Who could do his best if he knew he was watched, suspected, distrusted, and that the object of the vigilant criticism was to entrap him, to find out his defects, and to convince him by multitudinous arguments that he was wholly unfit for his position? Many of us could not work at all under such circumstances; we should simply succumb under their distressing weight if we did not resent them as intolerable humiliations.

Jesus Christ comes to us and says, "Ye are the salt of the earth"—says to a man who thought himself useless in the world, "Thou art as pungent salt in the midst of a putrid age," or, "Thou art as salt cast upon that which is already good, to preserve it from decay." Jesus Christ adds, "Ye are the light of the world"—tells a man who never suspected himself of having any light at all, that it is in him to throw a circle of radiance around his family, his neighbourhood, or it may be his country. Let us learn to follow this example in some degree. We get from men in many cases just what we tell them we *expect* from them; there is something in human nature that likes to be trusted with *responsibility*, something in us that responds to great occasions. Jesus Christ always supplied a grand occasion to his hearers, and he opened the broad and sunny road of hope. He did not point to the low and dank caverns of despair.

Jesus Christ recognises the true *influence of good men*. He called them salt which is pungent, light which is lustrous, a city set on a hill which is conspicuous, and may be seen afar by travellers and by those who long for home. Some influences are active—salt and light; some influences passive—a city set on a hill. We must not judge one another's influence by our own, and condemn any man's influence in the church because it does not take its tone and range from our own method of doing things. Some clocks do not strike. They have to be looked at if from them we would know the time of day. Some clocks do strike, and they strike in the darkness as well as in the light, and it is pleasant to the weary, sleepless one now and again to catch the tone which tells him that the darkness is going and the light is coming. Do not undervalue me because I am a man of but passive influence. Do not charge me with ambition and madness because I am a man of energetic influence. Let each be what the great, loving, wise Father meant him to be. There is room in his heart for all. The brain makes no noise; the tongue no man can tame—is the

tongue, therefore, not a divine creation? Yea, verily, God taught it its trick of speech and its wizardry of music. Is the brain not of divine formation because it makes no noise? Yea, verily, it is as the inmost church of the Lord wherein God shows the fullest of his heavenly and immortal splendour.

George Gilfillan, in his most energetic and inspiriting book called "Bards of the Bible," has some observations upon this matter of silence as contrasted with noise. As a boy I used to be very fond of that rhetorical writer, and as a man I do not renounce him. I have not seen the sentence for twenty years, but I think I can quote it even now in substance. He says, "The greatest objects in nature are the stillest: the ocean has a voice, the sun is dumb in his courts of praise. The forests murmur, the constellations speak not. Aaron spoke; Moses' face but shone. Sweetly might the High Priest discourse, but the Urim and the Thummim, the blazing stones upon his breast, flash forth a meaning deeper and diviner far." Young men, store your memory with such words as these, and you will never want to run away from your own society. The chairs may be vacant, but the air will be full of angels.

Yet whatever our influence may be, we may *lose* it. The salt may lose its savour, the light may be put under a bushel, and a city set upon a hill may turn its lights out, or build its walls against the sun and turn its windows elsewhere. The foolish discussion has been sometimes raised as to whether salt could lose its pungency—raised by people who wanted to catch the Saviour tripping in his speech. But in proportion to the difficulty is the solemnity. He who made the salt knows more about it than we do, and whatever may become of the salt, taking the mere letter as the limit of our criticism, we all know as the saddest and most tragical fact in life that some of the grandest intellects have lost their glory, and some right hands always lifted in defence of the right have lost their cunning. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. What I say unto one I say unto all—watch.

Every man sheds a light *peculiar to himself*. No man has all the light; no one star holds in its little cup all the glory of the universe. One star differeth from another star in glory. Suppose one of the least of the stars should say, "I am going to withdraw from the firmament because I see a great flame, compared with whose splendour I am but as a glowworm in the presence of the sun." Better for that little foolish star to say, "The God that made yonder great flame trims my lamp, gives me my little sparkle of light."

There is a right *way* of using influence. Observe how Jesus Christ puts the matter when he says, "Let your light *SO* shine before men"; the word *so* should be emphasized as indicating the manner of the shining. Light may be so held in the hand as to *dazzle* the observer; light may be brought too near the eyes, light may be set at a *wrong angle*, light may be

wasted, its beams be displayed so as to be of no use to the man who would read or work. Hence it is not enough to be luminous, but *so* to use our luminousness as to be of *use* to other people. There are men who, from my point of view, are luminous enough to light a whole country who do not light their own little house. There are men who need to be focalised, all but immeasurable men, with a kind of infinite capacity for anything, and who yet, for want of right setting and bringing together and focalising, live as splendid nothings and die as bubbles die upon the troubled wave. It is not enough, therefore, for us to have light and to be luminous; we must study the great economic laws by which even a little light may sometimes go a long way, and a great light may throw its timely splendour upon the road of him who is in perplexity and doubt.

Our Saviour further teaches us that our light is so to shine that our good works may be seen. He does not say that the worker may be made visible, but that the works may be observed, admired, imitated, may induce men to give glory to the Father which is in heaven. It is thus that his own sun works daily in the heavens: who dares look at the sun when he so shines as to fill the earth with all the beauty of summer? We turn our eyes up to him and he rebukes us with darts of fire; he says, "Look down, not up; look at the works, not the worker." So we may feast our eyes upon a paradise of flowers, and get much of heaven out of it, but the moment we venture to say, "Who did this—where is he?" "Show me the worker," the sun answers us with a rebuke of intolerable light. So no man hath seen God at any time, but we see his son Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, yet we count his stars when the great daylight is away; we wonder how they were hung upon nothing, and how they shine without wasting, and what they are—porch lamps of a King's palace, street lamps on a heavenly way—who can tell? None, yet the bare question-asking stirs the mind and the heart with a noble wonder that is almost religious. What wonder, then, if you cannot look at the sun, that you cannot look at the God that made the sun? If he is invisible in himself, he is not invisible in his ministry. We also are his offspring. In every little child I see his work, in the meanest human life I see the infinitude of his wisdom and the beneficence of his purpose. In myself I see the divinity of God.

Thus our lesson stands in the meantime. A kind word of encouragement has been spoken to us: we are not regarded as little, insignificant, contemptible, not worth gathering up: we are spoken of as salt, light, and a city set on a hill. Let us answer the grandeur of the challenge. We have been told that the best influence may decline and die: salt may lose its savour, the light may be extinguished. Let us hear the solemn exhortation, and exercise a spirit of vigilant caution. We have been called to a certain manner of life; let us take heed unto the call, lest having magnificent powers we waste them as rain would be wasted upon the unanswering and barren sand.

XVII.

FULFILLING THE LAW—THE MINUTENESS OF THE LAW—LEARN BY DOING—
A GRAND OPPORTUNITY.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, surely thou dost put us into the fire to take out of us all that is bad, and to make us as good as thou art, according to our degree. Thou dost not delight to see our life in pain, thou hast no pleasure in death, and the darkness thou dost abhor. All thy purpose concerning us is love, therefore dost thou try us by many ways, that we may be brought into thy purity and love, and show forth thine infinite holiness. Thou dost smite the pride of our eyes and rob our right hand of its riches, and cause our right foot to tremble and to fall, that thou mayest do some good to our soul, awakening the attention of our love, and charming the trust of our heart that it may give itself wholly to thee and live in none beside. Give us this view of thy way amongst us, and then our fears shall no longer distress us, but upon our smitten life there shall shine a great light as of the very hope of heaven. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but rather grievous ; nevertheless afterwards it worketh the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin, and our strength has not been utterly crushed in the great warfare. Behold, thou hast purposes of mercy towards us in all these struggles, fears, contests, and subtle temptations. Thou art training us, by a wondrous education, to be like thyself in all pureness and grace. Thou hast chastened us sore, but thou hast not left us utterly in the hands of the tormentor. We are cast down but not destroyed, we are persecuted but not forsaken ; thou dost save us with an infinite salvation, and no man can pluck us out of our Father's hand. Undertake for us in all our way, set before us to eat and to drink what thou wilt, grant unto us rest or unrest, send upon us the great storm or the benediction of light ; only in the end make us true and good, fit for thy society, and qualified for thy service.

We have to bless thee in long, sweet hymns for thy loving kindness and thy tender mercy : having begun to sing thy praise, our hearts would sing themselves away in grateful song, for thy mercies are without number and thy loving kindness cannot be measured. Through the dark gate of our fear thou sendest angels of light and deliverance ; through our sickness thou dost bring healing of the soul ; when we are far away in the wilderness where is no sanctuary, thou dost gather us into a house not made with hands, and thou givest unto us songs amongst the rocks.

We put ourselves into thine hands for the few days we have to live—how few ! Our days are as a post, speeding on its urgent way ; our life is like a weaver's shuttle, flying to and fro, too quickly for the eye to follow it ; we are consumed before the moth, and we are digging our own grave every day. Do thou undertake for us in all things, granting us sanctification of every trouble, deliverance out of every perplexity, and where we expect to die may we by thy grace begin to sing.

Work within us all the miracles of thy grace, Thou Holy One. We have read of thy curing of those that were diseased and raising up of those that were dead, and our poor ignorance has been startled into impious wondering as we have beheld the marvels of thy power. Help us now to realise in our own hearts the infinitely grander miracles of thy grace. Wash us with blood, cleanse us by the wondrous sacrifice of thy Son our one and only Saviour, recover our hearts of their leprosy, and touch our blind eyes that we may see with the vision of the soul. Recover us from all alienation, from all bitter hostility, from all insubordination of heart; bring us one and all, with unanimous and joyous consent, to sit at thy feet, and to know no will but thine.

Pity our littleness, and let our infirmities become sacred unto thee as opportunities for the exercise of thy gracious power. Thou knowest what anger there is yet in our hearts, what pride, what ambition, what self-sufficiency, and what cunning secret trust there is; that after all the key of the kingdom may fall into our hands and be used according to our desire. Lord, cleanse our hearts of these evil spirits, and leave none of them behind, but reign thyself in the chambers thou hast purified.

We think of all for whom we ought to pray, for the sons and daughters of pain, long, wearying, intolerable pain—God pity them, and speak some gospel too sacred and tender for our rough lips. Be thine own minister, Holy Ghost, and speak to the hearts of all who suffer. We think of the poor and the perplexed, the friendless, the wandering, the homeless; we think of the stranger within our gates who is here to join our song and come to join our supplications for all the mercies of heaven upon this wondrous life. The Lord's gospel be multiplied unto them all, and the Lord's grace be upon every heart lifted up in true and simple desire for better life.

Regard the land in which we live, give wisdom unto our counsellors and direction to those who lead our affairs. With the plentiful spirit of thy grace do thou bless and enrich our Sovereign the Queen, continue long her reign, and as her days are many may her blessings be even more. The Lord cause prosperity to return to our trade and commerce, and establish confidence in all our honourable relations with the various empires and nationalities of the earth. The Lord give unto us as individuals, as families, congregations, churches, and a nation what we most need from heaven; bind us one and all with new oaths of loyalty to love and serve the Cross—when we are tempted to put baser devices on our banner may we hear the voice of the tempter, and know it to be the voice of the devil. Amen.

MATTHEW v. 17-20.

17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“THINK not.” There is a possibility of having false notions about Christ. Closely observe that the subject may be right, and that our idea concerning it may be wrong. It is not enough to be attached to a good

cause, we must worthily represent that cause to those who are looking on or listening. You say, for example, that you believe in Christ, but in having said so you have given me no clear notion of what you really do believe. I must ask you some questions, such as—Who was Christ? What do you believe about him? and why do you believe? The name is excellent, but what is your precise idea about the meaning and influence of that name? So, at the very opening of his ministry, Jesus Christ had to recognise the possibility of mistaken notions concerning himself. We are not at liberty to say that if a thing be true it will so shine upon the mind as to commend its truth to us and to bear down all prejudice and all misconception. Even Jesus Christ himself was not understood by his contemporaries, his disciples, or the friends of his own house. First of all, therefore, he has to do a negative work, he has to call man to the right mental mood and attitude, he has to awaken that latest and fastest of all sleepers—*Attention*. He will not be rushed upon, he will not be seized by the extemporaneous genius of mankind, he will not be treated as a feather that any fingers can catch in the wind. There must be thought, consideration—right thought, close consideration; for only as the result of patient and devout reflection, inspired and directed by the Holy Ghost, do we come to have clear, complete, right conceptions of Jesus Christ.

“Think not.” That was a legal phrase, it was used by the lawyers and by the interpreters of the law. Literally it means—“Do not get into the habit of thinking,” or, “Do not become accustomed to think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets.” He was warning his disciples, and through them all Christian ages, against a mental habit. What is there so difficult to eradicate as unintelligent prejudice? You think, and think, and think, until, by the very processes of your own mind, you come to the conclusion that what you have thought must be true. Christ warns us against intellectual prejudices; mental habits that start from a wrong base, live and grow up into formidable proportions and strength. Christian attention should always be young, Christian attention should always be impressible, Christian attention should stand a long way from old and hoary prejudice; Christian attention should always be ready to take on the phase of the moment, and to hear the note of the passing tune.

“Think not that I am come to destroy.” Gentle one, thou didst not come to destroy, thy name is Saviour. And yet he did come to destroy. “For this purpose was I manifested, that I might destroy”—there he takes up the word, takes it up as thunder might take it—“the works of the devil.” But no work of God would he destroy; the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. The Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them. Think not that I am come to destroy the law—that is, to make a dead letter of it, to treat it as a mistake, to say “Now we will utterly ignore all the ancient law and take a

new point of departure, and begin again upon a new foundation." I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. What does that mean? To fulfil—that is what the noonday does to the dawn. The dawn is cold, gray, struggling, the noon is the culmination of its purpose and interest. The noon is not something different from the dawn, the noon is the dawn completed. When the first gray light fell upon the dewy hills, it said, "I mean to be noon, noon is in me, and I will climb the zenith and stand right above the world and flood it with infinite splendour and beauty." The summer fulfils the spring; there is no schism amongst the seasons: the spring comes and does its little elementary and initial work, plants its little crocusses and does all it can for the outside world, does it quietly, sweetly, fragrantly, with wondrous grace and love, then the summer comes and does in infinite grandeur what the spring could only begin. It fulfils the spring.

Manhood fulfils childhood. You say the child is father of the man. I need no better illustration. The law prefigured and anticipated the gospel; statutes, precepts, and commandments began that marvellous process which culminates in principle, grace, truth, inspiration, the divinely recreated and ruled intuitions, which sees a root by the penetration of vision which the literal schoolmaster could never give.

You are merchantmen and traders—tell me how is a promissory note fulfilled. Show it to me: I will fulfil it thus: I tear it into little pieces and throw it into the dust. Have I fulfilled the note? You instantly tell me that I have not fulfilled, I have destroyed. Then show me another and I will fulfil it thus: By thrusting it into the very midst of the fire and letting it go up in flame. Have I fulfilled it? You tell me instantly that I have done in this case as in the former; I have not fulfilled, I have destroyed. Then pass the promissory note at the date of its maturity into the hands of the man who signed it, and he pays you the money pound by pound to the last demand, and, having got the money into your hand, what has been done with the promissory note? It has been destroyed by fulfilment, and that is the only destruction possible to any law that is right.

The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. I prefer another way of stating that. The modern Greek would not understand that expression if he read it in the original tongue. "What is the meaning of that expression?" I have myself said to a modern Greek; and he said, "You have not caught the idea at all in your English." "Then what is the idea?" "Why," said he, "it is this,—Not the law was our schoolmaster, but the law was our nurse, or guardian, or care-taker, to bring us to our schoolmaster, Christ." We know what that means by daily illustration in our own English life. You send your little child in the care of some one to school. The maid takes the little creature and says, "Come, and I will take you to school," and away they go together to the place of instruction.

Now, the law was our care-taker, our companion, to take us to our school-master, Christ; Christ keeps a school, Christ calls those who go to his school his disciples, his scholars; Christ says, "Learn of me." Christ is the teacher of the world. The law took us hand in hand to Christ. The law is one—there is no change in the divine education of the world. We are not to suppose that Christ was an afterthought in the divine mind, or that his coming marked a sudden departure from sacred precedents. All that went before him pointed to him. Every man said, "Not I, but there cometh one after me."

The Bible from the very beginning says, "I am going to be a gospel." If the spire of your church is rightly built it will say to the artistic observer on its very first course of stones, "I am going to be a pinnacle." There will be a set in the very first line of stones which the artistic eye can see, which, being interpreted, is—Pinnacle, sharp, finger-like, pointing to the sky. It does not begin to be a spire a long way up, but from the very first, if it has been conceived by a true architect; it begins to be a spire when its very first stone is laid in the depth of the earth. So with this Bible-building. I did not know what it was going to be, but I saw that it was going to be something other than it was in itself just at the particular moment of my observation. Now that I go back upon it with more learning and with a keener power of observation, I see that from the very first verse this Book meant to be a benediction, to have set upon its uppermost points these words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." So the law is not broken into unrelated parts, it is from the beginning meant to be a complete and final cosmos.

What wonder then, if Jesus Christ should continue to say, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." In the seventeenth verse you have the word "fulfil," in the eighteenth verse you have the word "fulfilled," and yet they are not the same word as they were originally written. In the eighteenth verse the word fulfilled means—accomplished, a purpose turned into a reality, a seed fully grown into a great tree, to which nothing could be added in proportion or in beauty.

"One jot or one tittle." Why, then, is there nothing superfluous in the law? There is nothing insignificant in all the works of God. Pluck me a grass-blade, and let me see what I can do with it. How many veins has it which could be done without? How much blood circulates through all this veinous system? How much less might have done? Can you mend it? Can you sharpen its point? Can you accelerate its circulation? Can you pluck out of it one tiny fibre that the little thing could have done without? Take care how you touch it, for it is God's handiwork.

"One jot." One *yod*, a little thing that is not a letter in itself, so much as the adjunct or the helper of some other letter—a *yod*, a silent thing. The

name of the wife of Abraham was turned from Sarai to Sarah, and it was the *yod* that did it : it was that little, silent, insignificant adjunct that turned her into Princess. God is careful of His *yod*, or *yot*, or *jot*,—He does not dot his *i* for nothing, nor cross his *t* merely for decoration : there is blood in the act. Take care ; touch not the Lord's anointed, and do His prophets no harm. The destruction of the law by literalists and meddlers, by mere outside observers and worshippers, such as the Scribes and Pharisees, begins by interfering with the jot and tittle. Who would take a large sharp knife and begin all at once in shocking and impious vulgarity to scratch out the whole law ? And yet many a man who would shrink from that coarse blasphemy begins with finer instruments to interfere with the *rod*, the dot, the tittle. He says, "Nobody will miss that." We do things little by little, insidiously, that we never could do by thunder-like assaults.

All character seems to go down by interfering with the *yod*, the dot, the jot, the tittle, the iota, the subscript, the accent, the breathing-point. Who jumps right off the temple top into pits of darkness at one grand leap ? A man begins by giving up the morning service, by going to church occasionally, by dropping little customs, as he calls them, and comparatively insignificant habits. What is he doing ? He has begun a work, the end of which is destruction, ruin, death. It is to me no wonder, therefore, that Jesus Christ should depose and degrade into an inferior position whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so. Observe how these words go, in what perfect and suggestive rhythm they fall upon the ear—break and teach. And in the second member of the sentence observe how the same rhythm is preserved—do and teach. Work begins in the individual relation to the law ; when I have broken a commandment I long to get companionship, to bring others into the same condemnation : having broken it, to justify the breach, to show that it was better broken than not, and on the ruins of my own character set up as the seducer of other men.

Then do and teach. Who can teach if he does not first do ? If he be a mere hireling the whole words would have been committed to memory and would trip off his reluctant lips without music or force. My teacher must at least *try* to do what he says. If he fail I will not despise him, if his efforts be sincere. I know that human infirmity will mar men, and diabolic temptation will do its utmost to despoil and pervert the purpose of his heart, but his will shall count as his deed.

Many of us are so anxious to enter into the metaphysics of Christian doctrine that we refrain from doing the little that we understand. Let me speak for a moment to this little child. Little child, lying in your cot, you must walk as soon as you have learned to do so. You will learn to do so by lying just where you are, and by looking at the ceiling of your nursery twelve hours every day. You must think about walking, analyse

it, ask what locomotion really means, and where the word came from, get clear definitions, and don't you stir from your feathery cot till you have had a complete analysis of the whole method of locomotion. Hear me? Yes.

What would you think of me as a teacher of walking? I say rather, "Little dear, I am going to lift you out of this, and you are going to walk from this chair to that, eighteen inches apart, and I am going to stretch my arms almost around you all the time, till you get over the ground. Now go." The eighteen inches have been passed, and I feel as if a crisis in that child's existence had also passed. But it is the right way; there is no other way.

Wouldst thou be a sober man, set the glass down there, and turn your back upon it and go in the other direction. Who was it—some shrewd old teacher, certainly—who said to a man who, intending a certain branch of learning, said that he was going to seek out a private tutor, that he might learn this branch of which he was ignorant, whereupon the old man said: "Engage a tutor? Tut, tut, take a pupil." Do you thus learn. What was the name of that great Cambridge professor of geology?—was it Sedgwick? He came to put in a claim for the chair at Cambridge, and those who were in authority said, "Do you understand geology?" "No," said he, "I do not; but I understand enough to enable me to keep ahead of the young men who come here to learn it, and I will engage to always keep ahead of them." He was appointed, and how he did keep ahead of them history will never fail to tell. If you want to understand a subject, deliver a lecture upon it. The people will never know. They will applaud you and pass a vote of thanks, and all the time you will be saying, "Oh, if they only knew how little I know about this, they would never have had me here, and certainly they would not have proposed this vote of thanks." If you want to oppose the Government of the country, whatever that Government may be, write a five-hundred page essay upon the whole scheme of English Government. Do it with a bold hand, and you will be surprised when you come out of the process how much you have really taught yourself.

Well, what is true with modifications on all those lines of analogy, is pre-eminently, and may I not say infinitely, true of this kingdom of heaven. We learn by doing, we become preachers by being practisers, they that do the will shall know the doctrine. The Lord reveals himself to his industrious servants. It is when we are persevering on the right road, scrubbing and drudging at oftentimes unwelcome duties, that God's angel stands up before us and flings upon our faith a sudden and gracious light. Blessed is that servant who is faithful, he shall have cities in heaven to rule.

Jesus then came to fulfil the law. There was a moral law, the meaning

of which was obedience. He became obedient, even unto the death of the cross : he had no will but God's—"Not my will but thine be done." There was the fulfilment of the moral law. There was a *sacrificial* law, the slaying of animals and outpouring of blood and offering of gifts. This man was both the Priest and the Victim. He built the altar and slew himself upon it with priestly hands. Thus he fulfilled the sacrificial law. There was a *national* law, a theocracy, a gathering together of the people, a federating of tribes and sections, a grand nationalistic idea. How did he fulfil that? By founding his Church. Upon this rock I build my Church. Empires mean, when rightly translated, Churches ; Politics is a word which means, held up to its highest point, Morality ; Nationality, too often debased into a geographical term, causing many distractions and controversial definitions, really means, when fructified, the Church, the Redeemed Church, the Theocracy, the God-Government. The kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Then cometh the end, when we shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and his Father, having fulfilled the law as a tree fulfils the acorn, and God shall be all in all.

We are in the line of this education, we are helping on this glorious ministry. Would God I could arouse every sleeper and inflame with Heaven's fire every reluctant heart to take this upward progress. Teach no other notion of advancement, move with Moses, the minstrels, the prophets, the Christ—be in that succession, and if thou hast not ten cities to rule, thou shalt have five, or one, or some share in the final and everlasting dominion.

Behold, I set before you the door, wide open, of a grand opportunity. Seize it, and be thankful and glad with the joy of rapture.

THESE SAYINGS OF MINE.

By JOSEPH PARKER, D. D.

VOLUME II.

XVIII.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH — FALSE SABBATH-KEEPING — ORTHODOX AND
HETERODOX.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless thee for the gift of rest. Enable us to take it as thou dost give it with joyfulness, and may we, as the result of its acceptance, be stronger, and happier, and more useful in the world. Thou dost cause a great sleep to fall upon the life of man, and out of that sleep, as out of a grave, dost thou bring him again, quieted, and rested, and blest. Thou hast also given a rest for the soul, a time of quietness and peace for the mind ; may we enjoy it to the full, knowing that to-morrow will bring its toil and its burden, and that soon we shall be in the world again, confused by its manifold tumult. May this be a Sabbath in the soul, a rest in the heart, a benediction pronounced upon the inner life, and under its soothing and healing influence may our best nature rise again to claim thyself, with all the impatience and delight of filial love.

May thy word dwell in our hearts richly ; let all the sweetness of its music be heard by the ear of our soul, and may the light, which is above the brightness of the sun, shine upon our entire life and make it beautiful with the beauteousness of heaven. We come to thine house as men flee to a sanctuary, a refuge in the time of peril, a shelter in the great storm, and a place of prospect from which they can see the better time, the brighter morning, the greater land. Disappoint no soul that waits upon thee in trembling, reverent love. Speak large words in reply to our prayer, and while we are yet praying, do thou flood the soul with thy love, and lift us above all that is mean in earth and time.

Thy hand has been put out towards us in great richness of love, thou hast withheld no good thing from us, thou hast spread our table morning, noon, and night, thou hast been round about our dwelling-place as a defence, thou hast kept the storm from destroying us, and thou hast given thine angels charge concerning our life. Therefore do we return to thy holy sanctuary with a new song upon our lips, and a new gladness in our hearts. Meet us, we humbly pray thee, according to the urgency of our need, our pain, and our desire. Where the burden is heavy, thou canst lift it wholly off the trembling and crushed spirit ; where it is more needful that it should remain than it should be removed, thou canst give sustaining and comforting grace. Not our will but thine be done, herein. Where the pain is intolerable, sharpening itself into a great fiery agony, the Lord come with heaven's own balm and save those who are in great distress, lest they be swallowed up of sorrow overmuch. Where our desire is towards the heavens and all heavenly things, becoming a solemn and urgent prayer for the indwelling of the kingdom of Christ in the heart, thou wilt not say No ; thine answer shall be a great Yes of acquiescence, and in the heart desiring thy Son there shall be a great light and a peculiar joy.

We would put the remainder of our life into thine hands, we would think nothing,

be nothing, do nothing but under the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit. Undertake for us, we humbly pray thee, and send us bread, little or much—light, dull or splendid, and do thou make us contented because it is of thy giving and sending, and may our joy be in thyself and not in the passing circumstances of the dying day. Where any heart is set against thee stonily, with obduracy and obstinacy of feeling, in great rebellion and tumult, the Lord break not such a heart to its destruction, but break it to its healing. And bring in those that are afar off, that they may see thy light and be affrighted and saved by thy grace and thy redemption. And where any are in great fear and distress of mind because of their relation to thyself, send forth the spirit of thy Son into their hearts, the spirit of thy redeeming and sanctifying grace, recall all tender memories and all blessed associations, awaken the feelings that are lying dead, and give to such to know the power of the assurance of faith. Help us all to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. Make us true, honourable, sincere, before heaven and earth, enable us to enter into the spirit of thy gospel and to exemplify all its beauty and its tenderness. Save us from the poverty of the letter which killed, and lead us into the spirit which giveth life, and may all our conduct be attuned by thy Spirit and lifted up by thy grace, and may it become a great light shining afar to the guidance of any who are in doubt and fear.

The Lord pardon our sins, and delight in doing it, the Lord repeat his miracle of grace in our life every day. We say this in the name of Jesus, our Priest, our Intercessor, the Daysman between thyself and us : thou hearest him always, thy delight is to look upon his face, and to consider what he has done. Behold our shield and look upon the face of thine anointed, and from the inner and hidden sanctuary send us forgiveness and bless us with all spiritual help. Disappoint the bad man in all his evil counsels : cause him to forget himself, and strike him dumb when he would speak forbidden words.

The Lord help every honest and good man to do good whilst his little day lasts, and may we all be found in the end good and faithful servants, inspired by thy spirit, upheld by thy grace, made strong by thy truth, rejoicing in the assurance that the life spent in thy service will be crowned with heaven in thy presence. Amen.

MATTHEW v. 20.

“ For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”

FOR *righteousness* read *rightness*. Then the text will read, “ For I say unto you, that except your rightness, your notion and idea of what is right, shall exceed the notion and idea entertained by the Scribes and Pharisees as to what is right, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Given, a ministry which begins in this tone, to know how it will end. It is impossible that it can end otherwise than in *crucifixion*. The Cross is *here*. If the Scribes and Pharisees get to know that a man has been speaking so of them, they will never rest until they *kill* him. The shadow of the Cross is in everything spoken and done by Jesus Christ. He here assails the religion and the respectability, the learning and the influence of his day. This is more than a speech, it is a *challenge*, it is an impeachment, it is an indictment of high treason—how then can the speaker finish his eloquence but in a peroration of blood? He must die for

this, or play the hypocrite further on. A man who talks so, in any age, even including the nineteenth century, must *die*. The reason we do not die now is that we do not speak the truth. The preacher now follows those whom he appears to lead : if he put himself into a right attitude to his age, its corruption, its infidelities, and its hypocrisies, he would be killed. No preacher is now killed, because no preacher is now faithful.

Consider who these Scribes and Pharisees were. They were the bishops and clergy and ministers of the day. Suppose a reformer should now arise and say concerning the whole machine ecclesiastical and spiritual, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness that is turned out of that machine ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." I do not know that we should nail him to wood with vulgar iron nails, but we would take care to pinch him so in bread and water as to take the life out of him. Christianity is nothing if not an eternal challenge in the direction of honesty, reality, breadth, charity. Has not the whole Church, in all its fragments and communions, become a mere theological grinding machine for turning out certain quantities and colours, of regulation extent and tone ?

Religion was polluted at the well-head. It had become a ceremony, a profession, a dead adherence to dead formalities, synagogue-going, word-splitting, hand-washing, and an elaborate system of trifling and refining. Understand who these men were. They *knew* the law : the Scribes spent their time in copying it, in expounding, or rather in confounding and confusing those who listened to their peculiar expositions of its solemn requirements. They were not illiterate, so far as the law was concerned : they knew every letter, they had a thousand traditions concerning it, they formed themselves into synods and consistories for the purpose of extending, defining, and otherwise treating the requirements of the law. They were so familiar with it as to miss its music, as we have become so familiar with the sunlight as not to heed its beauty. A rattle, a sputter in the air, will excite more attention than the great, broad, calm shining of the king of day. The Scribes were the men who professed to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven upon their girdles, and yet Jesus Christ, the reputed son of the carpenter, arises and says to them, "Ye are not in the kingdom of heaven at all ; actors, mimics, pretenders, painted ones, ye are not in the spirit and the genius of the heavenly kingdom ?" No man dares this day say a word against a bishop or a minister—I speak of all churches, and not of one in particular—without being publicly and severely reprimanded for his impious audacity. Jesus gathered himself up into one strain of power, and hurled his energy in one blighting condemnation against the whole of the Scribe and Pharisee system of his day. Beware ! He was *killed* ! He did not talk against disreputable persons, as the world accounts repute ; the Scribes and the Pharisees were the most respectable

people of their generation, they were looked up to as leaders and guides by those amongst whom they lived. They were the saints, the pillars of the Church, the lights of the synagogue, the very cream of respectable society : yet this Galilean peasant beards them all, lays his soft but sinewy fingers upon their throats, and says, "Stand back, ye defile and pervert the kingdom ye profess to serve." Do not, therefore, let us be too bold and too faithful. The cost of integrity everywhere in a corrupt age is—*death*.

I infer from Christ's treatment of the Scribes and Pharisees that it is possible for men to *deceive themselves* on religious methods—to suppose that they are in the kingdom of God when they are thousands of miles away from it. Is it possible that any of *us* can have fallen under the power of that delusion? I fear it may be so. What is your Christianity? A letter, a written creed, a small placard that can be published, containing a few so-called fundamental points and lines? Is it an affair of words and phrases and sentences following one another in regulated and approved succession? If so, and only so, there is not one drop of Christ's blood in it : it is not Christianity, it is a little intellectual conceit, a small moral prejudice. Christianity is life, love, charity, nobleness—it is *sympathy with God*.

My belief is that if Jesus Christ were to come into England *to-day*, the first thing he would do would be to condemn all places of so-called worship. What he would do with other buildings I cannot tell, but it is plain that he would shut up all churches and chapels. They are too narrow ; they worship the letter ; they are the idolaters of details ; they are given up to the exaggeration of mint, rue, anise, cummin, herbs and weeds of the garden and the field ; but charity, nobleness, honour, all-hopefulness, infinite patience with evil—where are they? If judgment begins at the house of God, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? In disputing about the letter, the danger is that we neglect and despise the *spirit*; we quarrel about trifles ; we are founders of sects and parties, and the champions of our own inventions ; we pay tithes of mint and anise, and neglect the weightier matters of the law. The Christianity of this day, so far as I have been enabled to examine it, has no common meeting ground. If Jesus Christ came amongst us now he would have to call upon the leaders of the various denominations, and if he did not happen to begin at the right quarter he would have but scant hospitality. If he called upon the Independents first, the Plymouth Brethren would decline to see him ; and if he called upon the Primitive Methodists in the first instance the Independents would urge the claims of an earlier ancestry. He would find us in pugilistic attitude, separated by cobwebs, or bickering and chaffering with one another over high walls, and pinning sheets of paper over little crevices in those walls lest any of the saintly air should

get through to the other side. Is this the Church Christ died to redeem? Is this the blood-bought host? Where is our common meeting ground?

Let me now show you what religion had been brought to by the Scribes and Pharisees in their time. I called attention to some of these points in a discourse not long ago. I cannot do better than ask your attention again to those very points. Take the instance of Sabbath-keeping. To what pass do you suppose the Scribes and Pharisees had brought this matter of the fourth commandment? Recent writers upon the life of Christ have been at great pains in reading the Talmud (or doctrine), the Mishna (or repetition), and the Gemara (or supplement); and it would be amusing, if it were not distressing, to find how these theological carpenters have whittled away the broad, grand, solemn commandments of our Father in heaven. With regard to the Sabbatic observance, recent authorities tell us that the Scribes and their allies laid it down that a knot which could be untied with *one hand* might be untied on the Sabbath day, but not one that required *both* hands. A man might carry a burden upon his shoulder, but if that burden were slung between *two*, or even slung between the shoulders, the carrying of it would be a breach of the sanctity of the Sabbath day. It was unlawful to carry a loaf in the public streets on the Sabbath, but if two people carried the same loaf the act was good. It was so written in the Mishna and the Gemara. Understand this. If a man carried a loaf in the public streets, it was breaking the Sabbath Day; but if he got some other man to take hold of another end, they two could be carrying it without a breach of the commandment! This was the state of things when that carpenter's Son came into the world. The law forbade any visiting upon the Sabbath day—when I say the law, I mean the traditional law—yet the Scribes must visit; how then was this difficulty to be overcome? They fixed a chain at one end of the street, and another chain at the other end of the street, and they called the enclosure one house, and thus the painted hypocrites went backward and forward, dining and drinking, and feasting and revelling, and yet keeping the Sabbath day! Two thousand cubits was a Sabbath day's journey, but two thousand cubits was too short a walk for some of these traditionalists. What did they do? On the Friday they went two thousand cubits and deposited a loaf, and where a man deposited a loaf he was entitled to call the place his home for the time being. So the literalist walked his two thousand cubits to his loaf, and then began his Sabbath day's journey of two thousand cubits further on. Do you wonder that when a man whose soul was aflame with righteousness came into such corruption, he damned the society of his day, and said it was not in the kingdom of heaven? This is the way to try Christ, this will show you what he was—no trimmer, no oscillating theological pendulum, now here, now there—but a fire, a judgment, a stern word, a living critic of the corrupt heart. It is in such instances

as these that I see the shining of his real personality, and it is in such denunciations as are in the text that I see the beginning of his crucifixion.

When the Pharisee invited him to dine, he went in and sat down to meat without washing his hands, and the Pharisee marvelled that he should eat with hands unwashed. His marvelling was audible in all probability, and Jesus Christ answered it with the severest denunciation. We cannot understand the importance which was attached by the Pharisees and others to the washing of hands before eating. Not to wash the hands before a meal was, we are told by competent annotators, equal to homicide. Dwell upon that fact for one moment. Not to wash the hands before eating was, in the estimation of the Pharisees, an act equal to the killing of a man. Jesus Christ, knowing this, went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to eat without hand-washing. Did it take no courage so to act upon personal conviction? Was this a weak-minded man, was this an effeminate Redeemer? Does it cost nothing to rise up in daily, manly protest against the most settled and cherished usages of the time? Give him the honour due to his energy, consider the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and then tell me if he was the carpenter's son or the Son of God.

So far was this matter carried by the Pharisees that no man, but themselves probably, could touch the parchment or skin upon which the law was written without being pronounced unclean. So we learn from those who take an interest in such studies that the question was asked of them, "How is it that a man can touch the pages of Homer and be clean, and yet he cannot touch the parchment or skin on which the law is written without being defiled?" The answer was, "Because of the peculiar sacredness of the law." Thus extremes meet. It was because the law was so holy, that no man might touch the parchment on which it was written without being pronounced ceremonially defiled. And one commentator tells us that there was something like an ironical and sarcastic joke among the people of the time, who said to those high authorities in the law, "How is it that we can touch the bones of a dead ass without contracting pollution, and yet cannot touch the bones of John Hyrcanus, the most saintly of the High Priests, without being unclean?" And the casuistic answer was, "Because Hyrcanus was a holy man, and his very holiness caused those who touched his bones to be unclean."

It was to this pass that religion had been brought by the Scribes and Pharisees, the traditionalists and the literalists of the time before Christ. There were hundreds of refinements, colourings, degrees of violation of the law and breaches of requirements of the letter, and it required a man a lifetime to read all that had been written as to the violation of the law, so that by the time he had become acquainted with all the traditional exac-

tions and requirements of the literalists he was an old man. Can you wonder that when an earnest soul came to take charge of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, he sent a fire on such paper palaces and devoured the walls of such sectarian and monstrous restrictions? Jesus Christ came to give *liberty*. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." With the besom of destruction he swept these things into the sea. He said, "Away with them, the kingdom of heaven is purity, peace, love, charity."

What say you to following this new Leader? I like his tone, it sounds like the tone of an honest heart. But for him we should have fallen in the wake of these men, in all probability; and our religion would have consisted of innumerable lines of exact requirements, punctual observance, ceremonial cleanness, until our souls would have been vexed within us, and life would have been reduced to one daily chafe and fret. Jesus Christ came and said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you. What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, O man, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?" "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

This question arises, and I would put it with the sharpest emphasis of which the human voice is capable, were it in my power to do so—*What is our religion?* I dare not ask what mine is. It is church-going, it is ceremony, it is going to a particular church, it is singing out of a particular hymn-book, it is being set within a certain regular surrounding of circumstances. I am so afraid of my religion—I speak of mine that I may not reproach others—becoming a question of routine and regulation. I now ask a man to put down on paper what he believes, then I take it up and I examine it, and I say, "You are orthodox." To another man I say, "Put down on paper what you believe." The man writes it. I examine it, and say, "Heterodox." The orthodox man has gone out of the church. I ask him to bring in his week's report of work done, and he says, "I bound your certificate upon my forehead, I went amongst men as orthodox, and I have sent at least two hundred people to hell for not believing what I believe. I got them to put down on paper what they believed, and I found they did not know what they did believe, and so I sent them all to perdition, and I have waked up the church; and I will do the same next week." Heterodox man, bring in *your* report. How does it read? "Visited ten poor families, gave each of them five shillings and a word of encouragement, and told them to send for me if I could be of any help to them at any time. Saw a poor woman sitting on a door-step, without a friend or a home in the world—

"O it was pitiful,
Near a whole city full,
Home she had none."

Made an appointment with her, gave her something to be going on with, and I intend to see this woman as often as possible, until I get her established in life." Who is the Christian?

What, then, is Christianity? A broken heart on account of sin—going to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the wounded One, the Priest, and saying—

"Forever here my rest shall be,
Close to thy bleeding side,
This all my hope and all my plea,
For me the Saviour died."

Then, out of that coming all the beautifulness of life, which grows, and grows only, in the garden of God.

XIX.

DIVINE EDUCATION—CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY—SELF-DENIAL INEVITABLE—CHRIST'S TEACHING IS SPIRITUAL.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, surely thy word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. Thine eye of judgment is as a great fire, from the light of which nothing can be hidden. Thou triest the reins and searchest the hearts of the children of men. Thou wilt not be satisfied by the offering of the hand, thou dost demand the loyalty of our undivided love. Thou dost make great charges upon us—who can answer thy call, for thou demandest the whole heart? Surely we are surrounded by infinite temptations, the earth claims us, sense and time urge their importunate appeals, the necessity of the passing hour claims to be answered instantly—yet thou dost thunder down from thy heavens upon us the demand for our united heart. Surely thou dost also send grace, so that thou supportest the soul on which thou dost lay this great obligation; thou givest more grace, thy commands are equalled by thy mercy; if thou dost call for much, thou dost give the needful strength; if the burden be heavy, thou dost give us power to sustain it every whit. Enable us to look into our hearts and to see the condition of our spirit, and awaken within us the cry, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew within me a right spirit.

Save us from imagining that by fulfilling the letter we have fulfilled the law, and that by our outward observances we prove that we have entered into the inner sanctuary of thy kingdom. Show us how possible it is to read thy Book in the letter without understanding it in the spirit, and how easy it is to wash the hands, and how all but impossible to cleanse the heart. Herein is thy gospel sweet to us, the very word we need, the one voice that touches with its sacred music, our wonder and our desire. The blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin: thou hast made provision for the cleansing of every heart; we bless thee for its fulness, we thank thee that every one of us can avail himself of thy grace; we bless thee that there is no guilt too great for thy cleansing. Thou canst come over the mountain of our transgression though it be high as the heaven, and thou canst melt it so that it fall away, and thou canst meet us in reconciliation, and in all the warmth and joy of eternal affection.

We praise thee that we may read thy word to our understanding, to the profit of our heart, to the sanctification and obedience of our will, and so as to realize all the comfort and strength which thou dost design to give unto the life of men. Let a light shine upon thy word whilst we read it, so that we may see its inner beauty, its heavenly grace, and let thy Spirit work in our heart that we may give great and glad welcome to all the messages of Heaven.

We have done the things we ought not to have done, there is not a finger upon our hands that has not sinned against thee, and thou knowest, in numbering the hairs of

our head, that our sins are more in number than they. Our way has been broadened out for the society of the evil, and our souls have been shut up so as to exclude the light of the good. We will not seek for words in self-defence, nor shall we try to build up a high wall to shut out the judgments of God. We will fall down before thee, and, in tearfulness and contrition and penitence, each will say, "God be merciful to me a sinner, and repeat thy miracle in my cleansing and redemption."

Help us to live the remainder of our days before thee in all reverence, quietness, love, and usefulness. Enable us to remember the brevity of the day, the sudden coming of the night, and to be obedient with all diligence and ardour whilst we can. Wherein thou has prospered us in basket and in store, let these goodnesses lead us to repentance, let all these proofs of thy outward regard for our life lead us to consider how much thou hast done for our redemption and sanctification, and thus may we grope our way little by little from that which is outward and perishable to that which is internal and indestructible.

According to our necessity do thou now come to us. Touch every one of us with a beam of light from heaven, speak a word especially to each heart; whilst the great general truth is being proclaimed in universal terms, may a tender accent fall upon every ear, as a special token of thy peculiar care and love. May the old forget their age in the gladness of high communion with heaven, may the youthful imagination be touched into a religious wonder whilst the great truths of heaven are being proclaimed with fulness and unction. May the slave of time and the serf of the earth pause in his toil to hear of the kingdom wherein the service is rest. Heal us wherein we are sick, give us light wherein the darkness is too thick to be penetrated by our own vision, and lead us evermore, one step at a time, not where we want to go, but where it is best for us to be.

The Lord's angels be our servants, the Lord's light be our morning, and the infinite gospel of the blood of Christ be our hope and joy in the time of torment and despair. Amen.

MATTHEW V. 21-32.

21. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time (after the return from Babylon, when synagogues began to be established), Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of (liable to) the judgment:

22. But I (the personal pronoun is emphatic) say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca (any term of personal contempt), shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool! shall be in danger of hell fire.

23. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar (if thou shouldst be offering), and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee;

24. Leave there thy gift before the altar (reconciliation is better than liturgical propriety), and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

27. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

28. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee ; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

31. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement ;

32. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery ; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

THIS shows us the principle upon which the education of the world was being conducted by the Divine Teacher. Perhaps the education could not have begun otherwise than very roughly. The mind is not prepared for the higher form of truths, and the more spiritual application of them at the beginning. We all need to be trained. In our higher training we must go, as in our lower tuition, a step at a time. Do not be too hasty in your movement. Easy come, easy go, is a proverb which applies in many directions. Always read over again the last lesson before you begin the next, if you wish to be really accurate and profound scholars. You know how you train your child. First you lay down some broad and general commandment. He is not to break things, he is not to endanger himself, he is not to touch fire, he is to keep away from the water, he is not to use his little fists, and so in some broad and general way you indicate what the child is not to do. If you spoke to the child in any other terms and in any other tone, your education might be of a very superior order, but it would be utterly lost, so far as the child's appreciation and obedience are concerned. You must begin where the child can begin, you must humble yourself and take upon you the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death, the death of your intellectual pride, even the death of the cross, and must break up your words into very little tones and syllables in order to suit your youthful auditor. It would become you, perhaps, by reason of the elevation and range of your own intellectual acquirements, to adopt a very high tone to the child : but you must come down out of your intellectual sky and talk the plain and common language of the earth if you would make any good impression upon the child's mind and heart.

So at the beginning it was, perhaps, enough to say, "Thou shalt not kill." But there came a time in the training and advancement of the world when a keener tone was to enter into the divine teaching. That keener tone we hear in the words that are now before us. Christ has brought us a long way from the broad and rough commandment, Thou shalt not kill. He asks us to pass a line and enter into a kingdom in which we are not to think unkindly or unjustly of one another. He discovers for us that the

principle is the same in evil speaking as in murder. With those sharp eyes of his, to which the darkness and the light are both alike, he says that in the unjust thought is the principle of manslaughter. It would, therefore, have been but poor work on his part to come down and repeat the old broad general morality; he must bring in a new standard, he must set up a new kingdom, he must flood the world with a purer light. Herein he sets up his throne of judgment amongst us to-day, and he calls us up one by one to be measured and weighed. Let us hasten to obey his call.

What have you to say? He will ply the charge of slaying men—what is your answer? An instantaneous, frank, unreserved denial. So far, so good. Have you ever thought one unjust thought respecting your neighbour? Where your glibness now? If you have, then you are still in the old school, and you have not entered into the Christian kingdom at all. Where then are the Christians? Judged by that high and pure standard, my mournful answer to the inquiry is, I cannot tell. There are no Christians. Jesus says to us, in effect, "If you come to me, simply saying that your hands are clear of human blood, you belong to the old school, you are faithful scholars of them of old time; but the first condition of entrance into my school, or the first proof of being in that school, is that a man be not angry with his brother without a cause. There must be no evil thinking, evil speaking, evil judgment, uncharitable criticism." Who then can stand the test of that fire? "What do ye more than others? You do not kill, you do not steal, you do not commit adultery, you do not make yourselves amenable to the law of the land—what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans the same?" So he definitely chides us, and we have no answer.

Still he would lead us on little by little; he would not deny us a place in his kingdom if we can honestly say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. I am still in the body, and I feel all the passion and urgency of my lower nature. Sometimes a cruel thought does arise in my heart, and sometimes I give too generous a welcome to uncharitable criticism of my brother, but afterwards I hate myself for having entertained so vile a guest. God be merciful to me a sinner." If such be our speech, then it pleaseth the great Christ, the Man of the shepherdly heart, to give us a position in his school and teaching.

Let us beware of these vain distinctions of ours. A man does not kill, and therefore he claims to be a Christian. Jesus Christ says to him, "That is an insufficient and untenable claim altogether. A thousand men who never go to church can say the same thing. You must adopt a higher tone, or you know nothing of the spirit of the Cross and the love of God." Thus our preachers must urge upon us the ideal side of things, and we must not pardon them if they do other. They must not come down to us and tell us that not killing is equal to loving. Though they condemn

themselves with every breath they breathe, and thrust sharp swords into their own hearts with every syllable they utter, yet this must be done, the ideal must be lifted up and magnified that we may see how far short we fall or come of being true Christ-ones. We call ourselves respectable persons ; so we are, with the publicans' respectability. There is not a man here to-day, probably, who cannot walk up and down the thoroughfares of the city and defy the magistrate to touch him. That is not Christianity, that is respectable paganism—that is not the religion of the sanctuary of Christ, that is ceremonialism, high paganism, outward cleanliness. Christianity is a condition of the heart.

How is it with us when that question, keen as a sting of fire, is put to us, namely, What about your inner life, your heart? You do not kill, but you think evil of your neighbour ; you do not slay a man with the sword, but you whisper unkind words about your friend. You do not violate the open laws of decency, but yours is an uncharitable judgment ; you have not passed a counterfeit coin, but you would take away a reputation and wound a heart. You would not openly tell a lie, you say you scorn to tell a lie ; yet if two constructions can be put upon any human action, you elect the worst of the two. If that is true of you or me, by so much we are not in the kingdom of Christ at all. We may be expositors and critics and respectable pagans, but we are not in the Christian kingdom at all.

Terrible is the talk of Christ's as a great burning judgment, and it keeps us at bay like a fire. What wonder if sometimes our hearts are so dejected as to think that no progress is being made with Christian civilization at all. When a man seventy years of age can talk just as he did at thirty, as uncharitably and unfeelingly and hopelessly about his kind ; when the very first thought that occurs to his mind is one of ungenerous criticism, how can he have been in the school of Christ? Charity thinketh no evil, charity suffereth long and is kind, charity believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, charity never faileth, and without charity no man can be a follower of Christ.

Jesus Christ is very urgent about these human relations of ours ; therefore he says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." We are not to remember whether we have anything against our brother ; that would be easily done, our memory needs no spur on that side, we so soon forget our own delinquencies. Where did my last word of fire drop? What heart did I wound in my last speech? On what right did I trample in my last transaction? Whom did I strike down in order to accomplish my last purpose? Let me examine myself thus, and I shall be a long time in getting to the altar. At the altar, whited,

painted hypocrite? Leave the altar and go away to discharge your plain human duties, bind up hearts you have broken,¹ comfort those you have thrown into dejection, and apologise on both knees to the woman, the child, the man you have injured, and then come and take up your hymn-book and lay your offering on the altar purer than snow.

I do not wonder that Jesus Christ does not make much progress in the world, and I do not wonder that any old trickster in words and conjurer in doctrines can get more followers than Christ. He keeps men away from him by these judgments of fire. His doctrine is a continual rebuke, the very holiness of his speech creates a torment in the heart that is not equal to obedience. But wherein he is severe he makes good work; he builds slowly, but he means that no wind shall ever throw down the towers which he rears. He collects his members very gradually, and by a gate most narrow and strait does he bring men to him, but they never leave him. He is not building a beautiful house of smoke which the wind will blow away; he is building a Church, and he has calculated the strength of the swing of the gates of hell, and having built his masonry up with a slow hand, he says, "There—the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

He now passes on to give directions concerning the crucifixion of the flesh and the senses, and he lays down this great principle—and I include the whole teaching under it—namely, that under the stress of fierce temptation either the body has to be denied or the soul has to be injured. He says in effect, "I put the case before you thus: temptation will come, and one or other must fall, the body or the soul." The body says, "I will have my way, I will enjoy myself, I will throw off restraint, I will do what I please, every appetite shall be gratified." And the soul sits as far back as it can, in the foul house, and mourns like an exile. I see it, I see its drooping countenance, its eyelids heavy and red, I hear its great sob, I see its infinite dejection. The great principle is that denial has to come into your life somewhere. You deny the body or you deny the soul. Deny the body and the soul comes to the front and floods your life with sacred light, with heaven's pure splendour. Gratify the body, and the soul retires, and its hot tears fall in the hearing of God. Self-slaughter takes place somewhere; it is for us to say where it shall take place. It can take place in the cutting off of a hand, or in the thrusting of a dagger into the very fountain of life, and it lies within the power of the human will to say where the wound shall be inflicted.

There is a bloated man who never said "No" to an appetite. You see it in his face. That is not the face of his childhood developed into noble age, that is another face: he is made now in the image and likeness of the devil. His very eye has a twist in it, his very speech has lost its music. He does not want to come into a pure home, he does not want to

look upon the unsullied flowers, he does not care to listen to the birds singing their sweet song in the spring light. His affections are elsewhere. All the urgency of his life moves amid other directions, he is less a man than he ever was, unhappily.

Here is a man who has crucified the flesh, the affections, and the lusts thereof ; he has cut off his right hand, plucked out his right eye, struck himself everywhere with heavy blows, but his soul throws over his maimed condition a sacred light, a beautiful expression. The form is rugged, the countenance is marred, but through it there is a soft shining light which tells that the soul is growing angelward and Godward, and every day sweetens his nature and prepares it for higher society.

In looking at all these injunctions, let me urge you to beware of nibbling criticism and exposition. It would be easily possible for us to spend many mornings over the discussion of the paragraph which is now before us. I question whether it would be profitable to do so. In reading Holy Scripture seize the principle, get hold of the genius, the divine meaning, and in proportion as you are critical about the mere letter are you in danger of losing the divine inspiration. Suppose, to make the meaning clearer, I should undertake to explain to you the meaning of the word *sky*. I begin by telling you that it is a word of one syllable, I point out that that one syllable consists of three letters, I call your attention to the fact that it opens with the nineteenth letter of the English alphabet, and that it closes with the last letter but one in that alphabet. What do you know about the meaning of the word *sky*? You know nothing of it. Let me tell you that the word *sky* is not to be looked at or spelled or taken to pieces by rough vivisection of mere letters, but lift up your eyes when the morning is spreading itself above you in all its beauty and freshness, and one look into the great arch will do more for your understanding of the term sky than all the mere conjuring with the three letters that the most skilful literalist could ever do.

So it is possible for you to take to pieces every one of those words in this long paragraph, and yet to know at the end nothing about the meaning of Christ's doctrine. His doctrine is one of inward purity, of spiritual rectitude, of absolute and loving sympathy with God. There be those, no doubt, who are most anxious to know what was meant by Raca, and Fool, and Hell-fire. To take these words to pieces might appear instructive, but so far as the doctrine of Christ is concerned it might easily be destructive. Raca, for example, is a forgotten word. Words come and go. To us it means nothing, but as used by those in the olden time it meant insolence, contempt—the man who called another "Raca," despised him, spat upon him, humbled the manhood made in the image and likeness of God. We have no such word amongst us now, but we have the contemptuous feeling, we have the up-gathering of our conventional respecta-

bility and our drawing aside from the unworthy, the meanly dressed, the unfavoured, the great unwashed. The great teaching of Christ is that contempt of humanity is punished by being thrown into Gehenna, the valley given up to fire.

In discussing the temptation of our Lord, we inferred the character of the tempter from the kind of temptations which he urged. We might apply the same principle to the teaching of Christ, and infer the character of Christ from the kind of teaching which he submitted to the world. Mark the undivided responsibility which he assumes—"I say unto you." The personal pronoun is there emphatic, it takes into itself all the meaning. In the first instance you have a plural term, "It hath been said by *them* of old time, but"—now comes the singular term—"I say unto you." There is no division of responsibility, there is no hiding of himself behind multitudinous precedents, there is no mere focalization of the wisdom of the dead ages. Here is personal responsibility, clear, definite, undivided, incommunicable. It required some courage on the part of a mere peasant to stand up and say to a great multitude of people, "I put myself above all that ever taught you in the ages gone." Yet mark how what he said was in fulfilment of truth and not in destruction of the ancient law. Christ did not say, "You may kill if you please," he accepted the teaching, "Thou shalt not kill," and he carried it on a step further. He said, "Out of the heart killing comes; make the tree good and the fruit will be good. It is no use for the hand to be able to uplift itself and show that it is without one drop of blood upon it—the question is, How many murders has the heart committed?" This is the true doctrine of development, this is the true fulfilment of the law.

Mark the intense spirituality of all Christ's teaching. He says, "How is it with the heart, how is it with the spirit, what would you do if you could, how far is your respectability a mere deference to the clay god of custom, how far is your outward cleanliness a mere expression of deference to the usages of the time?" A man is what his heart is, "A man is no stronger than his weakest point," says the strategist, and the moralist adds, "A man is no better than in his feeblest morality." We are to be judged by the heart and not by the hand. Many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." If we are humble in heart, contrite, penitential, self-renouncing, always wishing and desiring to be better, Christ will accept this purpose as an accomplished fact, and astound us by the revelation of his rewards.

Understand what kind of teacher we have now come upon. This is terrible preaching which we read in our text to day. It is a judgment upon the preacher if it be not a vindication. He must keep up to his own stand-

ard. Having challenged the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, he must show a better. Having demanded purity of heart, he must show it, or endeavour to show it. Having scorned as a final consummation all the moralities that every one before him taught, he must be faithful to the new and larger doctrine. If not, he opens his heart to all the assaults of even the least ingenious of his foes. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, his robe was seamless, no man could charge him with violating his own doctrine—he was the only preacher that lived his sermons, in him alone was perfect, absolute consistency. What he looks for from us is a humble, daily, loving endeavour to follow him. That is all we can claim, and we claim it with most bated breath.

XX.

THE BEATITUDES IN PRACTICAL FORM—ON TAKING OATHS—THE PERSONAL RESISTANCE OF EVIL—ON BORROWING AND LENDING.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we cannot mistake thy word, it is as fire and it is as music, it is as the sound of a mighty wind from heaven—there is none like it ; our hearts know thy voice, and when we follow thy word thy blessing upon us is like a great wave. Thou hast written for us thy book, thou hast given unto us thy Holy Spirit for its interpretation and for the enlightenment of our mind ; enable us to receive thy book, not as the word of man, but as the express deliverance and message of heaven. Save us from all the reading of the letter, that does not see into the meaning of the infinite Spirit, bring us into sympathy with thine own purpose whilst we read thy wondrous words. We long to hear thy voice ; it will soothe us, it will give us courage, it will answer every rising inquiry and repel every urgent temptation. Let thy voice fill the hearing of our soul to-day and make us glad with the music of heaven.

Give us release from the anxieties and torments of a worldly life ; lift us above the cares and distresses incident to an earthly pilgrimage, and bring us into thine inner chamber, where our hearts shall see the radiance of thy face, and our life shall be lifted up into a new and immortal hope. Thou hast been with us in the valley of the weep, and even in the darkness we have seen where the flowers were, and our hands have been filled with their beauty. Thou hast caused us to pass over stony places, yet even in the rock hast thou found a river of water, so that we have not died in the wilderness by reason of thirst. Where the water has been bitter thou hast given us a plant to heal its bitterness, thou hast turned upon us an eye brighter than the morning, and upon our enemies thou hast turned a cloud darker than the night. Because of thy great goodness we are here this day, living, with hearts uplifted heavenward, with a great desire going out after thyself that our souls may be completed in perfection and soothed with peace.

Hear us whilst we confess our sin, and whilst we mourn our iniquity. Let thy forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our one Priest and only Saviour, be greater than all our guilt. When we sin most we most need him, for he is the Saviour of the world and the Redeemer of those that are in bondage. Bring us all round his cross, and high above all the writing of those who slew him may we see the superscription traced by thine own hand, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We put ourselves into thine hands for guidance, direction, sustenance, and all things needful. We shall die to-morrow, but to die is to live, if so be we die unto the Lord. Our days are thinning down, so much so that we see through the remainder of them and behold the tomb at the other end. Yet, though our days be few, we would live them as industrious servants, being found diligent and faithful, stooping

down to our work with a hearty good will, and doing it in all the strength and fear and hope of God.

We commend one another with mutual love to thy gentle care. Carry our sick ones in thy great arms, press our little ones to thine infinite heart, kiss the tears of our sorrow from our reddened cheek, and give us a time of sunshine, when the storm has spent itself upon our poor life. Help every man who wishes to do better to realize this solemn hope; to every man who would lift himself up by thy grace and strength so as to catch the full shining of thy light, give grace, strength, comfort, and renewal of confidence every day. If any heart be set upon evil and any hand be trying to find what mischief it can work, the Lord confound the counsel of those who are wrong, and overturn the purpose of those who know not and fear not thy name.

Thy word awaits us, may we await its deliverance, may it come to us with great power and breadth, great simplicity and unction—may every heart throw open its gates to give right loving welcome to the kingdom of Christ. The Lord direct us in everything, individually, congregationally, socially, and nationally. Give righteousness and a spirit of mercy and judgment to all who are in high places. God save the Queen, and add many unto the days of her life; the Lord himself rule the nation and make us glad under his sovereignty. Send light and truth, purity and peace all over the world, and make the whole earth thy sanctuary, thou who didst redeem it with blood.

Hear us in these our uttered prayers, and as for the desires we may not and cannot speak, read them every one, as they lie unuttered in the heart. Wherein they point towards truth and better life and penitence and nobler purpose, thou wilt give them infinite answers of satisfaction and peace. Amen.

MATTHEW v. 33-48.

33. Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you:

45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the

46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.

WE had some difficulty in understanding the beatitudes, the music seemed to be too exquisite and refined for the rough instruments at our disposal. We hastened over them, rather than deliberately read them. As your teacher, I had a purpose in this; I knew that the beatitudes would all come up again in practical form. Who can understand abstract and purely spiritual truth? But that which is impossible from one point of view may be rendered comparatively easy from another. Jesus Christ now proceeds to give examples upon what we might call the black board. When he said, looking it whilst he did say it, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," we did not understand the meaning of the unfathomable doctrine. When he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," we thought he was speaking of himself, or of strangers, for we had never come within the sacred lines described by that simple yet immeasurable word, meekness. Now he is proceeding from doctrine to exhortation, and you will find under his exhortations the whole set of the beatitudes: he is giving you now to drink out of the wells he dug when he laid down the doctrine.

I cannot tell what he means by purity of heart, so he approaches my dull understanding with this practical direction—Do not be angry with your brother without a cause, do not call your brother by contemptuous names, do not describe any man wilfully and maliciously as a fool. I think these are easy exhortations, and when I begin to give them incarnation in my life I find they are supreme difficulties; I have not motive force in me enough to carry this tremendous engine along. Now I take him aside and say privately in the house, "I know now something of what you meant when you said, Blessed are the pure in heart." "Yes," he replies, "that was my purpose, and if your heart be not right you will never be able to do the apparently simple duties which I have now indicated. Unless there be pureness of heart there will be pollution of lips, unless there be rightness of heart there will be hidden and baleful fire in the spirit, and it will express itself in contempt and malice, and harshness and cruelty." So now that he comes into practical particulars, I find that they balance the spiritual doctrine which I could not understand. But I will try to do the duty—I shall be led back into the doctrine, and be made to feel that I cannot work with the hand except it expresses the inspiration of a cleansed heart.

So when he says to me, "If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also;" when I ask, "How is this to be done?" he says,

“Recall the beatitudes.” I then endeavour to remember what he said in the spiritual part of his discourse, and this sweet word returns to my memory—“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” When I heard that sentence the first time I dismissed it as a very beautiful conception, a high and beautiful theory, written in clouds and illustrated with sunset colours ; but now that it comes down to me in a practical form, I find it was no cloudy revelation, no mere touch of intellectual beauty, no flash of the moral imagination, but something sound, honest, vital, divine. So it is no use telling a man to turn the other cheek to the man who has smitten him if he has not first turned his heart towards meekness. You cannot put on meekness except as you put on paint that can be washed off. If you have not the meek heart, you cannot do the meek deed. Do not play at meekness, do not simulate meekness ; let us hide ourselves with Christ, who is meek and lowly in heart, then we shall be exactly what he meant when he told us that when we were smitten on one cheek we had to turn the other also. Throughout the whole of these practical exhortations you will find that he is reducing the beatitudes or spiritual doctrines to spiritual form and expression.

Let us now go a little into detail to establish this with some breadth of illustration. “Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.” That is, you have heard it laid down broadly that you are not to commit perjury : having taken a vow, you must be faithful to it ; having uttered your oath, you must carefully and deliberately reduce it to practice. It must not be made a dead letter, it must not be evaded, it must not be inverted, there must be no perjury or false-swearing or foregoing of the most sacred oaths of life ; but I say unto you, that that is a very poor advancement in the right direction. So far as it goes it is right enough, but go forward, follow me, so as to relieve yourself from the necessity of ever swearing at all. That is to say, let your heart be so sincere that your speech must be simple ; cultivate that state of heart in the sight of God which naturally and necessarily, by virtue of the divine compulsion, expresses itself in simple, transparent, and beautiful sincerity and simplicity.

I do not understand the Saviour as forbidding what is known as judicial oath-taking or swearing. He always recognised certain necessities of the time, and he adapted his revelation from the beginning to the hardness of the hearts of those whom he had to instruct. But he was bound to point to the ultimate line he set up of ideal conversation. It is his purpose to make us so like himself that we cannot but speak exactly what is true. Consider the monstrousness of any man speaking only what is true because he has sworn to do it. That man is a liar. In his very nature and blood he is false, if he will only speak that which is true simply

on the ground that he has taken an oath to do it. There can be no formal truthfulness : sincerity is a condition of heart ; it is not the result of a mechanical contrivance coming out of the kissing a certain book under a certain adjuration. Jesus Christ therefore educates the race up to the point of not needing to swear or affirm or declare, with unusual emphasis. He would have our very breathing to be the expression of our hearts' condition, so that if a man said Yea, he meant that, and that only : if he said Nay, there was no mental reservation, no subtle and unexpressed equivocation of meaning, no intention, deep down in the heart, to take advantage of a certain set of terms under a certain set of circumstances—that is the deep and glorious meaning of the Son of God. Be so right within as to be incapable of uttering one word that is not pure as light and as fire. It is to that high result he would bring us. We are dull scholars, and the teacher has yet an infinite work before him.

Jesus Christ then addressed himself to certain little trickeries that were in custom amongst the people. He told them not to swear by heaven, nor by earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by the head. Why did he go into this detail ? Because such was the corruption of his age, that there were great and learned men who laid it down as right to break any oath in which you could not find, in so many letters, the name Jehovah. There was one great man in history who openly avowed that he felt himself to be at liberty to break any oath in which he did not expressly use the word *God*. If the word *God* had passed his lips he felt himself bound in honour to fulfil his oath, but if he swore by heaven, by the altar, by the queen, by his hair, by his palace, he did but gather so much straw as he could cast into the fire of his passion and burn when he pleased. Jesus Christ, with that marvellous comprehensiveness of teaching which is characteristic of his school, proceeds to show that, though you may not have the name of God in your oath, whatever you touch is sacred and has God in it. "Swear not by heaven, for it is God's throne ; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool ; nor by Jerusalem, for it is his city ; nor by thine head, for he fashioned it and clothed it, and thou canst not make one hair white or black." So he delivered the term God from its consisting of so many letters and syllables, and showed that the whole universe was alive with God, and that to swear by a stone was to invoke the Creator that formed it. To be under such a Teacher is an inspiration, to hear such a man is to expose yourself to the mountain breeze or a whiff of ocean air full of life and giving life.

Take the next particular. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek turn to him the other also, and if any man shall sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And if any man compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." We all know to what absurdities and iniquities

a merely literal acceptance of these words would lead. You nibble at the meaning of Christ when you begin to think that you see it all in these bare words, as they would be understood by the unenlightened and unspiritual mind. What is Jesus Christ teaching here? He is teaching the great principle of forbearance or long-suffering. He quells all human passion, and sets upon human revenge the seal of his displeasure. Revenge is not to enter into our thoughts. As to self-protection it is written in our nature; it is not a debased instinct, it was in the original Adam, the divinely-shaped and divinely-inspired man, and the very first word spoken to the man constituted an appeal to this instinct, "Take care; in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Protect thyself." It cannot be taken out of our manhood, this instinct of self-preservation; it can be sanctified, moderated, ennobled, and this is what Christ meant it to be. I may smite in judgment or I may smite in revenge, but the individual man who is injured cannot smite in judgment. I smite in temper—that is the very thing forbidden. We caution a man against taking the law into his own hands—that is exactly what Jesus Christ means in this direction. You ought not to have taken the law into your own hands—Why? Because you were only an individual and the individual is incomplete. What, then, should I have done? You should have referred it to the complete man. What is his name? Society. Society will lay its terrific hand upon the man that smote you. When will you learn that you are only a part and not a whole, a fraction and not an integer? The judge, when he sits upon the bench and condemns a fellow-creature to penal servitude for life, is not an individual, he is the embodiment of Society, the representative of the latest civilization of his time and land. If you, being smitten on one cheek, turn round and smite the man who smote you, you may both be taken before the judge. Rather than that, turn to him the other also. Leave your defence and his punishment in the hands of the social man, the aggregate humanity, the judge.

This is exactly what Christ did himself. Christ did not personally resist evil. He exemplified the very doctrine now being explained. Personally, when he was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not; he gave his back to the smiters and his cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. But as Judge, not the Jesus of Nazareth, but the Son of Man, he shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, he shall divide the nations and open hell under the feet of those that despised him. We believe that thou wilt come to be our Judge. Every eye shall see him, they that pierced him shall mourn because of him, those whose hands are wettest and reddest with human blood shall seek mercy of the rocks and pity of the mountains, for the wrath of his face shall scourge them like the fire that awaits their coming. Resist not evil, do not take the law into your own hands; personally be meek, forbearing, long-

suffering, show that the spirit of revenge has no place in you, show that you would rather suffer wrong than do wrong, take the larger view, be gentle, hopeful, noble, and as to your sufferings, there is an organised anger that shall burn the adversary, there is a judicial scourge that shall cut to his bone. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," and he repays through organised society, through enlightened and established civilization, and by a thousand ministries which we can neither name nor measure.

"And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." This refers to the system of forced courierships. In ancient times and oriental lands, messages were delivered by couriers, persons were required to show the way to strangers. If you were lost upon a mountain or in a valley, it was part of your right to insist upon any person who was in the neighbourhood to go with you part of the road, to help you out of your difficulty. Persons could be compelled to bear messages and letters. One Simon, a Cyrenian, was compelled to bear the cross. Who would not carry that every mile he has yet to walk? The Saviour said, "If a man compel you to go a mile with him to show him the road, go two rather than not go at all. Show a cheerful disposition under the pressure, let your philanthropy absorb your convenience."

"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away." We all know that society would be wrecked in a very short time if this rule were to be literally applied. In fact it bears upon its face the proof that it does not admit of application in the way which the mere literalist would expect. It is too broad to mean anything as a mere letter; it is, as the lawyers say, void by generality. It means so much as to mean nothing. And yet it must have some profound signification? Certainly. Where shall we find that signification? In God's own government, just as we find the explanation of non-resistance in Christ's own conduct. God does not do this himself, as the literalist would interpret it. He does it in the nobler and larger way which is of no use to the mere devotee of the letter. Let me explain. I ask God to give me what I mention to him, yet he turns away. Then he tells me to give to the man that asketh of me. I must find the meaning of these words in the course of his own action. I would borrow of God, and yet he turns away from my cry. He judges what is best for me, what is good for me: He says "No" to many a prayer: many a desire of mine that I have sent out towards the heavens has fallen back upon the door-sill like a wounded bird. I know now what Christ means: he teaches me clemency, sympathy, he develops in me an interest in human affairs, he saves me from absurdity and folly and recklessness and from putting myself into the very position in which I should have gone to repeat the doctrine he lays down,

and thus keep up a system and action of absurd borrowing, now one man having it and now another, and so passing it between themselves through every hour of the day.

If you want to find the meaning of these sweet words, you can easily find them. Do not try to discover it in the letter. Whenever you are clement, sympathetic, large-hearted, kind-handed, you are going in the direction of the meaning of this passage. Jesus is not laying down little laws and small maxims, he is developing infinite principles which can be applied in every climate, and which can embody themselves under all the various circumstances which make up all the changefulness of human life.

That I am right in seeking the explanation of the whole doctrine in myself and in God is proved by what Jesus Christ immediately adds, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," that you may do in your degree as he does upon an infinite scale. He does not answer every petition, he turns away from some requests, he knows that difficulty has a place in the discipline and sanctification of life, and he uses the rod as sometimes the only admissible lesson. I would be taught by him, I would be like him, I would err, as we sometimes say, on the liberal side rather than on the ungenerous. I would rather be taken in than take in any human creature, I would rather try to find the means of healing a man than sourly turn away from his distressed face and his faltering voice. If that be my disposition of heart, I am in the school of Christ.

But take these exhortations as you like, you cannot give their application, without you have help from heaven. It is not in man that liveth to work out this sublime morality, it is not in the human heart as at present existing to find room for these divinities. He who made the heart must disinfect it, cleanse it, enlarge it to give hospitality to such guests.

XXI.

TRUE ALMSGIVING—NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION—THE MEANING OF LONG PRAYERS—THE HYPOCRISY OF FASTING.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would hide ourselves under the wings of thy mercy. We dare not look at thy law, for we have broken it, nor at thy righteousness, for it is now unto us as a two-edged sword; but thou hast permitted us to look at thy mercy. Thine eternal pity, those tears of thine that bid us silent but large welcome to all the love of thine heart. God be merciful unto us sinners. We have done our alms, and men have seen the doing of them; we have prayed, and behold our prayers have fallen back unheard, unanswered. We have fasted that we might draw attention to the dejection of our face. God be merciful unto us sinners. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done; we pierce ourselves with many accusations, we cannot spare the infliction of bitter self-reproach, we mourn, we repent, we bow down ourselves before thee in utterest humiliation, no voice have we of self defence. God be merciful unto us sinners. Our standard has been short, our balances have been unequal, our purposes have been double, our words have had one meaning to others and another meaning to ourselves; we have lied without speaking, by smiling, by action, by hint. God be merciful unto us sinners, make us clean of heart, clean in the spirit, right in our motive, holy within; then shall our life be a sacred sacrifice, thou wilt receive it daily in thy heavenly places as a well-meaning offering of the soul.

We bless thee for all thy patient care, thy long-suffering, thy tender mercy. Thou hast taken care of us, as if we were of consequence to thee; thou hast numbered the hairs of our heads, as if thou hadst not to count the innumerable planets, and set the stars in their places. Thou hast hidden us in the hollow of thine hand, and drawn us very near to thine heart, and many a message of tenderest love hast thou addressed to us in our low estate. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gifts. Thou hast given as thine only-begotten Son, Son of Mary, Son of Man, Son of God, Lamb of God, Saviour of the world, whose name gathers unto itself all music, and comes down upon our sin and woe like the very gospel of thine heart. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Thou hast not left thyself without witness in our hearts. Thou hast given unto us thy Holy Spirit to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come; to purify us as with flame, to illuminate our minds as with the very light of thy throne, to teach us the meaning of thy truth, and to help us to apply it to our varied necessities. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us. Truly we can render nothing in return, but it shall be well with us if with our hearts and lips we can bless thee for all thy love.

Thou art still in the world, thou hast not withdrawn thy rule from the sons of men, still the horn of thine anointed doth bud, and still thou givest unto him a lamp that

shall be a perpetual light. Thou liftest up the crushed truth, and thou givest renewed beauty to graces that have been trampled upon by heedless or cruel feet. The Lord reigneth, his throne is in the heavens, and his sceptre is stretched out over all. We know not what we do ; we cannot tell what a day may bring forth ; we hide ourselves in the infinitude of thy love ; we put our whole life into thy care ; we would expend it in thy service, we would yield it to thy glory.

Wherein any heart is heavily burdened to-day, let special messages of grace be sent to it from heaven. Wherein the light of any house has been suddenly put out, O thou, who hast all the lamps of the universe, do thou set a new light to chase away the sudden and heavy darkness. Where great tears of woe are starting from the eyes, because of bereavement, bitter disappointment, brokenness of heart because of family trouble, the Lord's own hand touch those tears and dry them, for our hands cannot touch a grief so great and heavy. Wherein our purposes are right, do thou prosper them ; wherein they are wrong or mistaken, do thou confound them. We put our life again and again, day by day, with every waking and every sleep, into thine hand : thou didst give it, and it shall all be thine.

Send thy word out to those who are not with us to-day, to those who are shut up in solitude in the sick chamber, suffering or waiting upon others ; be with those who are called upon suddenly to travel and leave us for a while, with those in trouble on the sea, with weary hearts too tired to pray, with those to whom life has become a great despair. The Lord lift the great cross higher, and let it burn with all the fire of his love, and throw out its heat so that the coldest heart may feel it and the most desponding life may answer its warming ray.

The Lord's light be held above his word, and the Lord's light spring out of his word, that in the light coming from heaven and springing from the written page we may see God's meaning, and give it loving welcome to our mind and heart. Amen.

MATTHEW vi. 1-18.

1. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them : otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

2. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth ;

4. That thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do : for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them : for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9. After this manner therefore pray ye : Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil : For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :
15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
16. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ;
18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret . and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

“WHEN thou doest thine alms do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets.” The boxes in the temple treasury were shaped like trumpets. Jesus Christ said, “Do not make a trumpet of the box : it looks like one, but do not use it for the purpose of calling attention to what you are about to put into it.” It is strange how we may pervert the most exquisite beauty, and turn it to false uses, forms, and colours, which God meant to lead us to higher thought and finer feeling. It is a box for the reception of secret alms, not a trumpet for sounding for the purpose of calling public attention to what is about to be done. Use everything for its right purpose, and beware of perversion ; do not say you got the suggestion from the thing itself—it was never meant to convey such a suggestion, it was meant for a totally different purpose. He is the honest man, as well as the wise, who seizes the definite intention of providence, and works along that line without putting upon it glosses and twists and perversions of his own.

“When thou doest thine alms.” Literally, and this may surprise some of you, when thou doest thy righteousness. In the fifth chapter and the twentieth verse, which we have already expounded, we read, “Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” What a different meaning is infused into the sentence now, when we replace the word *alms* with the word *righteousness*. I thought almsgiving was a matter of pity, transient emotion, kindly feeling. It is more than that : under all the flowers of the earth are the great ribs of rocks, without which the earth could not cohere and exist. I understood that when I gave alms I was displaying pity, kind feeling, nice sentiment, and that I was drawing attention to myself as a man of peculiarly good nature and most amiable sensibility. Nothing of the kind. It is right to give : when the strong man helps the weak, he is not showing you the beauties of amiability, he is not indulging or exemplifying a merely transient emotion, it is not a specimen of social chivalry, it comes out of the righteousness of God, the very law of right. If he had

done anything else, he would have been guilty before God of a violation of the spirit of righteousness.

When you took that dear little child off the streets and gave it a chair at your table, it was not an action that could be covered with some such words as pity, kindness, sympathy, gentleness, and amiability. All these words themselves are used oftentimes with too narrow a meaning. If our actions do not go back to the rock of righteousness, then they will be, however beautiful in their immediate manifestation, transient in their duration. They will be forgotten as dreams are forgotten when the light comes. On the other hand, only let us get the notion that to help a man, a child, a woman, to give alms to poverty, to do any deed of charity, is a right thing, and then see how our life becomes grand in solemnity, how it finds itself on the immutable and the complete, and how we cease to be moved by caprice and impulse that cannot be calculated and controlled, and become the servants of a great law, the apostles of an infinite and beneficent righteousness.

This almsgiving is to be done, I observe, in the sight of God. Then is God always looking? So the great Master teaches us. "Your Father which is in secret, your Father which seeth in secret, your Father who is always looking on." What, am I ever in the great Taskmaster's eye? Does that eye never close in slumber? Is there not one moment when it tires of looking? In that moment I might snatch his sceptre and dispute his sovereignty. But the Holy One of Israel slumbereth not nor sleepeth: the darkness and the light are both alike unto him. That which is spoken in the ear he hears in thunder in heaven. This gives me a very solemn and grand view of life.

Why, then, many of our processes in the matter of almsgiving must be given up. Sometimes men meet and challenge one another to do good. If it is done with modesty all but infinite, it is permissible. It is a dangerous trick. "I will give fifty pounds if you will give fifty pounds," says a man who imagines he is going to do something great. If it is a mere matter of taste, so far as any matter can be so limited the challenge is allowable, but if it relate to the higher charities, to consecration, to the outgoing and uplifting and offering of the heart to God, do not mention what you are going to do, ask not what other people are going to do. Beware of that most mischievous sophism, which says, "I am only waiting to see what others do." Stand before God, calculate the whole case in his presence, soliloquise in his hearing, have but one auditor, and that your Father which heareth in secret, and then do whatever is right, according to your then sanctified conviction, and God will do the rest.

Compulsion is not to enter into almsgiving, except self-compulsion, the best of all. If you compel me to do an alms or to give a gift, I will undo it if I can, when you are not looking, but if I am compelled by ministries

within to do an alms, I do it with my love. I could not withdraw it, it is given to God in holy sacrifice and grateful prayer. In this matter of religion there ought to be no compulsion at all, except the compulsion of love. That love needs continual warming. It is amazing how soon our affections become cooled by the chilling winds of the earth. So I must hasten to the sanctuary, I must get me into the inner spirit of the divine word, I must climb the sacred eminence on which stands the one cross, out of which all other crosses are cut, and so much I renew the fire of my love. For love in the church is nothing if it be not a constant flame. Let us beware of sudden outbreaks of fire. If they be beside the continual burnt-offering, they are good, but the burnt-offering itself must be steady, continual, daily, and if now and again the flame shoot heaven-high, so be it, but the steady glow must never fail.

We are to see the divine in the human in this giving of alms. When I give something to a little poor child, to whom do I give it, if my motive is right and pure? I give it to Christ. That is his own interpretation of my action, he astounds me by its vastness and brightness. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat." O hungry one, Christ is suffering the pang that gives thee pain. In all our affliction he is afflicted. Whenever a hand of righteous charity is put out to alleviate our distresses, he feels the tingling of it in his own pierced palm, and writes it, to be spoken of another day.

The hypocrites are not so, the actors are of another temper: their act is the same as the right act, but it is done from the wrong motive, and therefore it has no value in the sight of heaven. It is like a prayer that paints itself on the ceiling, not like a living bird, loosened from the secret heart and sent out to find its invisible nest in heaven.

Jesus Christ, then, is very deep in teaching. He gets down to the fundamental line, and yet in doing so there is a marvellous satire in his tone. Speaking about the actors or hypocrites, he says, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." They get what they seek; they seek applause, they get it for the moment and it dies away, and they are left with the void air. They get their heaven, an empty place, a silent chamber, a heaven they would gladly part with; when you have received your applause for your almsgiving that is all you will get, if you did it from a wrong motive. You will hear a clapping of hands and a stamping of feet, and an uproarious "Huzza!" for a second or two, and then, gone; and when it is gone, your heaven has vanished. As to the after work, who can tell what that may be when the mask is taken from the hypocrite's face, when the paint is washed from his countenance and he stands out in the ghastliness of his true meaning? My soul, enter not thou into such a secret.

You will find as you proceed with your lesson that Jesus Christ applies

the same principle to everything he now deals with. The fire is the same, he does not change the test, his chemistry is not fickle, throughout the whole he is seeking for purity of heart, and throughout the whole he shows how the trick of the hand may be made momentarily to represent purity of heart and purpose. Thus with regard to prayer. "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the actors, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." Right things may be done in a wrong way, and so may lose their value. It is right to give, right to pray, right to fast, but they may all be done in a wrong way.

We do not understand in England what is meant by these words, "long prayers, vain repetitions, and much speaking," though sometimes we say a prayer is long if it went, say, to the length of ten minutes, or fifteen, or twenty; if to half-an-hour, we describe it as very long and tedious; but that was not the measure indicated by the words of Jesus Christ. It had come to be in his time a matter of settled conviction among certain people, to whom he now definitely refers, that if they only prayed times enough, kept on saying the same things over and over again, they would purchase heaven as a matter of right, as you purchase an article by laying down a certain money value for it on the counter. The article is yours, it is not a gift of the original proprietor, it has passed on to you as having value received on the part of the man who first held it. So among the hypocrites and the actors, they thought that if they read a certain document called the Sch'ma—if they read that over and over again, and kept at it, and made a question of regular mechanical repetition of it, by a certain turn of the wheel they would be able to claim heaven as men claim a field for which they have paid the price. Jesus Christ having reference to this mechanical piety, said, "That is a vital mistake on their part; they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." Beware of vain repetition: in other words, beware of a mechanical piety. No prayer is long that is prayed with the heart: as long as the heart can talk the prayer is very brief—let that be the measure and standard of our long and much praying. Do not measure your prayers by minutes, but by necessities. Sometimes we have no influence with the King. He appears to have deafened himself against us or to have turned into stone at our approach, and our prayers and utterances are lost upon him as rain upon the barren rock. Sometimes we can talk the whole day with him, we cannot tell where the growing numbers of our praise will end, our heart is enlarged in great and free utterance, and then we enter into the mystery of communion; not asking, begging, soliciting, wanting more and more like the horse-leech, but talking out to him as the dews go up to the morning sun. When you have such opportunities, make the most of them, and do not let the words,

“vain repetitions and much speaking,” come into your minds as temptations. One sentence may be much speaking, and is so, if it be not meant. A day’s long talk, a night’s long communion, will be but too short, if you see the King as it were face to face.

Thus, again, Jesus Christ brings us to the point—“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Jesus Christ came to set purity of heart in opposition to the formalism and corruption of his day. He found that evil hands had written lies and blasphemies upon every beam in the Temple, he found that the windows that ought to have looked heavenward had been cobwebbed with traditions, and curtained and screened so as to conceal the iniquity which was wrought behind them. So, with glowing ardour, burning like an oven, he cleansed the desecrated house, and relighted its shaded chambers with the very glory of heaven, called back the exiled and dishonoured angels of purity, mercy, meekness, peace, and he banished the ghouls of selfishness, oppression, cruelty, and strife. He lifted, peasant’s son though he was, an arm of thunder and shattered the vile creations that were set up to mock the holiness of God.

“What think ye of Christ?” A grand Teacher. He made no beck and bow to his age, saying, “If you please, will you be good enough to hear me?” He spoke the eternal word, and there was something in the human heart that said, “This is he of whom Moses and the prophets did write.” You know the true voice when you hear it; there is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.

The Saviour then proceeds to apply the same principle to the matter of fasting. He did not find fault with fasting as a religious ordinance, but he said, in effect, “This religious observance has been perverted like prayer and almsgiving; now you must not disfigure your face, and so call attention to the fact that you are fasting; you must fast in your heart, it must be the soul that fasts. Is not this the fast that I have chosen to do unto heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, to speak for the dumb, and be feet and hands to them that are lame and helpless?” He did not find fault with the words, *almsgiving*, *prayer*, *fasting*, but he carried them up to their highest definitions. We have degraded every term we have ever used. In our Saviour’s time the hypocrites or actors used to spread ashes upon their heads literally, and used to tear their garments and make their faces the very picture and exemplification of hunger and dejection, and they used to walk up and down the streets, saying by these actions, “Look at us, how pious we are, how observant of the law; see to what extreme lengths we carry our devotion.” Christ looked at them, and his eyes flashed fire on them, and he said, “Hypocrites, actors, masked men, verily I say unto you, you have your reward. You put out your hand to catch a gilded bubble, you seize it with greedy fingers and it melts and dies.”

This matter of fasting was carried so far that one historian tells us it was mimicked and mocked in the Roman theatre. At one play, the audience being seated and in expectation of the performance, a camel was led across the stage, and that camel was in such a lean and miserable condition, looking so utterly dejected and forsaken, that voices called out, "What is the matter with the camel?" and the dramatic answer was, "This is fasting-time amongst the Jews, and the camel has been observing the fast." That is what our canting impiety always comes to; it is the tempting, snivelling hypocrite that is put upon the boards of our novels, and not the earnest and loving and true soul. When I come upon any character in a novel or romance that is meant to typify the ministry of the day or the Christian spirit of the day, I give the artist credit for endeavouring to set forth a hypocrisy and not a reality. I do not look even upon those Roman pagans as traducing a grand religious consecration, but as mimicking and mocking and bitterly taunting men who had forsaken the spirit of their religion, and had perverted and prostituted the letter to the most unworthy purposes. If any man shall attempt to travesty that which is real, true, pure, divine, the thick end of the beam shall fall upon his own head in due time. As to those who take delight in caricaturing things that are counterfeit and unfit and unworthy—you have a ministry in life, and I wish you success in the discharge of your grave and responsible function.

"What think ye of Christ?" There is a tone of reality about this Man's teaching. Is his ministry vital, is he working in the right direction, is this the reforming ministry which all ages need? Sometimes we say that our ministers preach to the times—in doing so they follow the example of their Lord and Master. If Christ were living now he would speak to the times: he would not speak to some dumb ages, he would speak to the men who are living around him, working all kinds of mischief, and having within them counsels and purposes unworthy alike of their manhood and of the divine vocation that is in all human life. I cannot imagine Jesus Christ coming to read something to us of an abstract kind. He would now and again lay down great breadths of noble doctrine, but he would be swiftly out in the age again. You would find him in the market-place, you would find him in the broad thoroughfares, you would find him where merchants most do congregate, you would find him in all the activities of life, trying everything by the fire of heaven. He lived in a time of corruption, he never shut his mouth concerning it. He saw a kingdom perverted and lifted up his voice in condemnation of it. He told the painted actors, the dressed coxcombs of his day, that they had not yet crossed the threshold of the kingdom which they pretended to hold in personal custody, and then, having cursed the corruption of his day as no other man had the power to do, he turned round, and with inef-

fable blessing, and with most tender speech, he spake to the weary and the heavy-laden, and the sad-hearted, to the woman that was a sinner, and to the little child brought for his blessing. And then last of all he poured out his soul unto death. A mistake—does any whisper such a suggestion? Looking at the life that preceded it, at the thunder and lightning of the denunciation of all wrong that went before it, at the beatitudes and the gospels poured out upon those whose hearts were broken and whose lives were weary—that death was the only fit conclusion; it belonged to the antecedent mistake, it set forth in the most vivid and graphic colours what had been indicated in hasty sketches in every day's beneficent ministry.

He died, he rose again, he lives, he expects us, he is preparing a place for us, and when he prepares, what will the result be? I have seen his earth, his flowers, his summers, his mornings—I have seen his sun, I have seen some of his innumerable stars. He will outdo it all, for he will prepare, not to be worthy of me, but to be worthy of himself.

XXII.

CHRIST ANXIOUS ABOUT THE HEART—THE SAFETY OF SPIRITUAL RICHES
—THE RECTITUDE OF MOTIVE—SECULAR ANXIETY AND WORLDLY
FEAR—THE USELESSNESS OF ANXIETY.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have read of thy care of our life, and without reading it in a book we know it well, for day by day thou art at our right hand, thou dost satisfy our mouth with good things, thou dost renew our youth like the eagle's, our strength is returned to us after its expenditure, thou dost keep our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, and our soul from death. Thou hast shown unto us great and wonderful things as we have come along the pathway of life ; we have begun to pray where we expected to die ; thou hast planted a tree beside the bitter lake, and made its waters sweet with the branches thereof ; thou hast planted flowers upon the tomb ; thou hast dried tears which no human hand of sympathy or tenderness could reach ; and, when the grief was keenest and the darkness most burdensome, then was the star the brightest and in the cold wind there were voices of hope.

We bless thee for all thy tender care, thy long-continued patience ; thou dost watch over each of us as if he were an only child. Behold there is no measure to the Lord's mercy, and his compassions fail not. We bless thee for thy great Book, so full of music and truth and beauty ; touching us at every point of our life, speaking to us the one word we most need, comforting us with infinite solaces, opening the prospect beyond the horizon of time, and enabling us to see into the rest and the joyous service of heaven.

We give ourselves into thy keeping ; we would have no will but thine ; we would not attempt to open any door but with thy key. Thou hast been our God and our Helper, and in thy love do we rest as in an inviolable defence. Show us more of thyself ; fill our whole life with light, may our eye be single, that our whole body may be lighted with the flame of thy glory. May our whole life, body, soul, and spirit, be a daily sacrifice on the sacred altar ; may our whole desire rise up before thee in a solemn and all-believing prayer.

We thank thee for thine house ; we bless thee that no storm can overtake us hidden in the sanctuary of God. The Lord's blessing be in every heart, the Lord's light shine upon every eye, and, as for our whole life, we open it now and give thee all the hospitality of our love. Come, abide with us, and in the breaking of our bread we shall see great revelations of heaven.

We commend one another to thy tender care. The Lord help every man, woman, child, now bent in prayer. Thou knowest the secret desire of each heart, the solemn purpose of each life ; thou knowest the sting that pierces the heart, the burden too heavy for mortal strength, the great fear that deepens into dejection, and threatens to become a mortal injury. Thou knowest our family life, our commercial difficulties, and our whole estate is known to thee. The Lord undertake for every one of us

according to the heart's necessity, and multiply unto us his grace, so that beyond all our want there may be an overflow of divine love.

We bless thee again and again, in never-ending hymn and psalm, for the gift of thine only-begotten and well-beloved Son. We know Jesus Christ, we have heard his words, we have touched the hem of his garment, we have seen the outflowing of his sacred blood: we remember that his cross was set up for us, and in the agony of our contrition he is our only hope. God be merciful unto us sinners: give us assurance of daily pardon, and strengthen our confidence in every divine promise: then shall our life be quiet and bright, and strong and good. Hear us when we sing thy praises, hear the desires we cannot put into words, see the falling of secret tears on account of secret sin, and help us one and all with the unfailing strength of thine infinite grace to live before thee in all faith, in all affection, and in pure desire to know and do thy blessed will. Amen.

MATTHEW vi. 19-34.

19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

22. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things

33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

In this passage you have, first, an *exhortation*, and, secondly, a *reason*

for it. The exhortation is, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth : lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The reason is, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." You will never understand the exhortation till you understand the reason given for it. Vain is all criticism upon the words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." It is in the treatment of those words that the annotators have failed. A thousand little and mean questions arise whilst we confine our attention to the words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." We are not in a condition to criticise that language until we complete the sentence and find at its close the all-convincing reason for giving such an exhortation.

What is Christ anxious about? What is it that he wishes to take care of? He himself gives an explicit answer to the inquiry. His one anxiety is about the condition of the HEART. "'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also ;' and it is the heart that touches my supreme solicitude. If the *heart* be right, the whole outgoing of the life will be right ; but if the heart be wrong, then all the actions that make up the sum total of the duties and exercises of life will also be wrong." Now I see the whole meaning, I understand what my Teacher intends me to receive as his doctrine. Provided my heart is right, he does not care if my possessions are heaven-high, if I can rise above them and stand upon them, and use them with mighty strength. He is most anxious that they should not be bigger than I am, his supreme anxiety is that they should not lure my confidence and make up the sum total of my hope and expectation. So long as I can treat them as so many conveniences and use them for the good of my fellow-creatures, he cares not how many, how rich, may be my possessions. He says to me lovingly, with infinite pathos and concern, "Brother, friend, man—keep thine heart right, keep thy love in its right direction, let thy life be a continual sacrifice, burning upwards to the holy throne that deserves it. Then, as for thy possessions, thou wilt be master, not slave. The more thou hast, the more the poor will have ; thou wilt be treasurer and custodian, thou wilt not be oppressed by the riches, but ennobled to dignity by them." So then there is no exhortation here against laying up property. The world must have property, and the more that property is in good hands the better ; and, concerning every man who makes a good use of money, I pray the Lord to send him tenfold more. The more he has, the more the poor have ; the more money the good man has, the more the whole church has. It is better that that money should be in the hands of a good treasurer than in the hands of an untrustworthy custodian.

Look at the figures in this exhortation, showing how keen was the observation of Jesus Christ regarding everything going on around him. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth cor-

rupt." The property of the contemporaries of Christ consisted largely of linen and embroidered goods. To have great stores of these was the Jews' great notion of wealth. Jesus Christ, looking at all the piles of linen and embroidery, said, "Take care that the moth does not get into them; remember that there is a moth—do not forget the consuming insect." It was a practical and most secular exhortation.

"And rust doth corrupt." The treasures were largely hidden in the earth. Men would dig deep pits in the field and hide their most valuable possessions, and there they would rust. Jesus Christ, looking at the man filling up the earth upon his treasure, says, "Remember the rust: what you have put in the earth there is exposed to danger: you may cover it up very carefully, but the rust will get at it." There is always some danger to be provided against.

"Where thieves break through and steal." The houses were mud houses, the walls were mud walls, and the thief is at the back yonder, breaking through, boring his way through the mud defence that he may get at the treasures hidden inside. Jesus Christ says to the builder of the mud wall, "Take care, it is only mud, understand that mud is not impervious: always remember that there are weapons of iron that can break through your mud defences." And again I say unto you, there is always danger to be guarded against, and a man is no stronger than his weakest point. Beware of the moth, beware of the rust, beware of the thief. Life is based upon caution, unless it be founded in God, and then it is lifted up above all danger, or the dangers that affect it themselves fall away before its supreme strength and immovable confidence.

So much for the exhortation, and so much for the reason. Now what is it as an *argument*? I am always struck with the common sense of this divine Talker. Apart from his metaphysics and high imagination and noble courage and heroism, there is an element of marvellous common sense. He grasps his subject: he lays upon it a grip that means "You cannot take this easily from me." Let us look at it merely as an argument.

Jesus Christ Says, "Riches can be *stolen*, riches can *perish*, riches can *fly away*, therefore look out for treasures that are not subject to these vexations and harassing contingencies." Is the argument sound? Look at it again. What you have in your hands may be taken out of them, therefore have something in your *heart* that no man can get at and steal. The reasoning is sound and unanswerable. He who has nothing but what he can grasp in his hands is no stronger in his possessions than his fingers. A man can wrench what he holds out of his possession, and they will be his no longer. Where is your Bible? If it is only in your hands as a book, though you are pressing it to your heart, it can be taken away from you, and you may be without it. But, where is your Bible? "In my head," say

you, "in my heart ; I know it." Then, though the book be burned with fire, the revelation is untouched.

Jesus Christ says, "Have an inward life, have an interior life, have a soul." The Teacher who teaches thus is a wise man. He warns us against the things that can be destroyed, and points us to the possessions that are indestructible. He tells you in so many words that you are no richer than your heart is ; though your books be many enough to make a library of, you are only as rich as you are in your thought, feeling, aspiration, desire after God and all things godly. I feel that such teaching is true : no long and laboured argument is needed to make me feel its truthfulness. If I speak right out of my heart and let my better self be heard, I say with the Scribe, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth."

Take it in another light, that it may be clearly seen by those who can understand better by illustration than by mere argument. You come into the house of your friend, and you are struck with his books, say upon *agriculture*. You look over the volumes and say, "Well, how very many books you have upon agriculture. I am surprised at your collection of works upon this subject." A friend belonging to the house says to you, "If you think the books upon agriculture are many, what will you say when I show you the library upon *astronomy* ? If you think these books a good many upon agriculture, when I show you the astronomical works you will be utterly confounded." By the help of that illustration, you go a little further and reason thus. If you think this man is rich in shares and stocks and fields and investments of one kind and another, what will you say when you see his thoughts, his feelings, his prayers, his aspirations, his plans for the amelioration of the race. Our inner nature should be so much in excess of our outer nature as to give the impression that we have no outer nature at all. We are to be so much larger in the soul than we are in the hand as to throw the hand into infinite insignificance, though in itself it have a giant's fist and can deliver a Herculean blow. Let every man therefore ask himself what he has in the bank of the heart.

"The light of the body is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil (double), thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !" The heart is in the eye of the life : always keep the heart pure and right, sincere and true, and you cannot stumble long. Let your motive be correct, and you will be brought along the right road, even though you may have stumbled into the wrong path for a moment. Let your heart be right, and I care not in what thicket you be tangled, you will see a clear, broad road out of it, and you shall yet rejoin the main path that lies right up towards the light and the heaven that is at the end of it.

How is it then with the heart which is the eye of the life ? What is your

motive, what is your purpose? Dare you throw back the screen and show the motive to heaven's light? If so, you cannot be weak; you cannot be the subjects of long continued depression and fear. O youth—my child, my son—give God thine heart; and as for thy mistakes, they prove thee only to be mortal. But once let your motives become mixed, let them double themselves back into reservations and ambiguities and uncertainties, let the inner life become a hesitation and a compromise and a trick in expediency, and you are blinded in your very centre and fount of light. And if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! If your supreme manhood be debased, how utter is the degradation. If you have gone down in your motive, you have gone altogether. So let a man examine himself as to his motives and purposes, and keeping these right, so as to bear the very test of fire and to stand the examination of light, he may maintain his life in the quietness of religious confidence. If you have got wrong in your motives, stop. Do not be lured away by inventiveness in making excuses and palliations. To your knees, and become strong by first becoming weak. No coverings up, no clever juggleries, no assumptions of appearance, but complete, unreserved, emphatic, contrite confession, and then begin again. Remember that your eye is the centre of light, and if the eye be put out or injured, no other part of you can receive that great gift. The eye once blinded, your finger tips cannot be flamed up into illumination, your whole body is darkness. With the eye, the light is gone for ever, and wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.

How marvellous it is that a single organ should hold so much, and there should be no alternative arrangements in this matter of light, looking at which we can say, "Well, it matters little if the light goes out at one point, it can come in at another." Such is not the arrangement of divine providence: you have the one inlet of light; lose that, and your whole body, though it be great and strong and healthy, and apparently beyond the touch of death, will be full of darkness. See how much depends upon one faculty, one organ. Let the ear be deafened and all music is lost; let the eye be blinded, and the whole firmament, with all its sun and stars, is but a covering of darkness. There is but a step between thee and death: thou hast but one right hand, take care lest it be paralyzed and fall uselessly by thy side for ever. These are the cautions of no alarmist; they are the strong, grand, pure teachings of a Man who breathed the mountain air, and had the sea's freshness ever breathing through his magnificent heart.

"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." We do not understand this in English. Men run away with very shallow notions of what is here said; these English words do not express the Saviour's meaning, except with indefinite-

ness and a great distance of appreciation. No man—literally, no slave, and we do not know, thank God, what a slave is. The slave had no will of his own ; every pulse of his body belonged to his master ; he dare only look as the master approved ; there must be no protest even in his eye, or he lost his life. He must stand, sit, come, go, at the will that was iron and that could not be broken. No man, says Christ, can sustain that relation to two masters ; he cannot belong, absolutely, body, soul, spirit, will, imagination, energy, feeling, to two different masters. Masters—we do not understand this in English. We never can enter into the tragical pathos of that awful word : never to be able to call an hour my own ; never to be at liberty to utter the voice of complaint ; never to be permitted to look my true self, but to wear a mask to please another's eye ; to be at the beck and call of a man who can take my life from me with impunity—that is to be under a master.

How many persons there are who have read this text so as to sever the spiritual and the secular. It is thus the Bible has been maltreated by some of its friends : it is thus that great excisions have been made, so that religion has been left in the church as an all but impalpable shadow. That is the meaning of this great Teacher—we must use the spiritual and secular, for all things are sacred according to the hand that touches them. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common or unclean. You miss the grandest side of life when you separate it into spiritual and secular. There are some persons who talk about the temporalities of the church—there are no temporalities in the church. There are those who speak of the business side of the church—there is no business side of the church in any degrading sense of the term : it is all business. “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” He who lights a lamp in the church is as he who preaches a sermon ; he who opens a door or keeps a gate, as he who breathes a gospel and unfolds a revelation. The difference is in the degree, not in the quality ; “He who sweeps a floor for thy sake, makes that and the action fine.” We must be lifted up in our whole conception of life and labour, industry and reward, if we would enter into the spirit of Christ in his interpretation of our life and its duties.

Now comes the grand wondrous discourse concerning *secular anxiety and worldly fear*, the beautiful sermon wherein you find the reference to the lilies and the birds and the grass of the field. Let us look at that wonderful sermon a moment. We are treating this gospel by Matthew in its *wholeness* and not going into the mere detail of the occasion—as a painter paints a landscape with a church upon it. He does not take you into the church, he simply throws the church upon the landscape as part of something else, and you must catch it in its proper outline and relationship. It is so I am treating this gospel. By-and-bye we shall go to the church and spend a day there ; by-and-bye we shall come into the detail

and study each particular delicate line ; meantime we have to treat the gospel in its totality, and under the direction of this feeling look at this most marvellous discourse.

“Take no thought for your life.” We do not get at the Saviour’s meaning in this English word “thought.” We do not, indeed, get into the right meaning of the word *thought* some three hundred years after the use which it first assumed. When this translation was made, the word *thought* meant something different from what it means to-day—it meant anxiety, restless, carking care ; it meant that penetration of fear which upsets the balance of life and turns the whole soul into moods of dejection and wearing anxiety. The word *thought* meant this in the time when the English Bible was translated—hence one of the historians says, “Queen Catherine died of *thought*.” Hence Cleopatra said to Enobarbus, “What shall we do, Enobarbus?” And the answer was, “*Think*, and die.” In other words, “Fear, fret, pine away, succumb to depression, anxiety, and all the influences that can vex and tear the balance of the heart.” It is against such thought that Jesus Christ warns his disciples.

Is it possible that any man here can be encouraging himself in languor and indifference and idleness by saying that he is considering the lilies and beholding the fowls, and yielding himself to the genius of this Sermon on the Mount ? I must rudely disturb his foolish and atheistical lassitude. Let us behold the fowls of the air for a moment, and see how far their course justifies the man who is simply folding his arms and sitting still and letting God take care of him. First, the fowls get up soon in the morning—where are you ? Away goes one of your props. In the next place the fowls are most industrious : it is one of my little pleasures to watch the industry of the birds, and, indeed, they seem to have no hours. I trust nobody will ever form them into a union for the purpose of shortening the hours of labour : that would be a great mishap in the air, to cut short their song exactly as the clock struck five ! O, the building that is going on now ! The straw-carrying and the feather-catching and the leaf-binding—what industry ! Up with the sun, working all the hours of the light, and twittering and trilling and singing all the time. There is another of your props gone, lazy man.

I find, too, that the birds are *self-supporting* : they would never take anything at your hand if they could help it. A bird is sadly driven when it comes to any man and says, “Let me peck at your hand, if you please.” The birds support themselves—who supports you ? You would borrow a shilling of your poor old mother if you could, and you talk about beholding the fowls of the air. You have borrowed of every friend you ever had—be just in your exegesis of the divine word, and add not the blasphemy of a fool’s criticism to the behaviour of a cowardly spirit.

And the lilies—is it a happy-go-lucky life with them ? Far from it.

The word *lilies* here is a word that may be so interpreted as to include *all* flowers, and the flowers are found in their *proper places*, they are where they were meant to be, if they are growing properly; not only so, the flowers are working in harmony with great *laws*. Every flower draws its beauty from the sun: the flower roots itself in dark places, and prays with open face for the great light, and holds itself out with gracious willingness to catch every drop of dew that it can hold. So we must be in our proper spheres, in our right relations: we must keep the economy of life and nature as God has established it, then we shall truly, with a wide and healthy wisdom, behold the fowls and consider the lilies.

Jesus Christ gives a reason for this exhortation again. He says, "Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?" He thus shows the *uselessness* of anxiety. Suppose now you sit up all night with your hands folded or twisted, in expression of keen unappeasable solicitude and yearning—what does it come to in the morning? Nothing. Suppose you should belabour yourself all day long, what does it come to to-morrow? To weariness, dejection, sadness, and to all the results of misdirected energy and irreligious folly. A great teacher now living has well said that if any friend of ours had told us one hundredth part of the lies our fears have told us, we never would have allowed him to speak to us again. We would have said, "Get thee behind me, thou lying man." But our fears come every day and tell us exactly the same lies, and we give them exactly the same confidence. Is that religion? It is, but only the religion of paganism. The religion of trust, love, faith, rests in the Lord and waits patiently for him; forms a grand and loving expectation, directs it often in speechless prayer to the generous and over-arching heavens, and calmly awaits the revelation and the whole answer of God.

This is how I want to live: I want to subordinate every desire to the one aim of seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness; I want to interpret that kingdom as meaning and including all other kingdoms; and I would calmly await the leading of divine providence. Why fidget yourself, why fret and annoy yourself, why go out and throw yourself into a bed of stinging nettles merely for the sake of doing something? I would not anticipate to-morrow any more than I would anticipate death. Death is abolished; there is no dying for the man who is in Christ. Let the child close his eyelids; he will open them in heaven. Let a pagan call that death if he likes; the Christian calls it life. Nothing wrong can happen to me if I be really rooted in God, and if my eye be set towards him with the one anxiety of receiving his light.

Given that I have to take care of myself, and make all my arrangements, and go up and down life as if everything depended on me, and my life becomes a cloud, a fear, a sting, a great distress; but given that I am creature, not creator, child of the one ever-living, ever-loving Father, the very

hairs of my head are all numbered, my name is written in heaven, and the whole plan of my destiny is mapped out in the skies—that I am, consciously or unconsciously, so long as my desire is as a pure flame, working out the divine intention. Let me feel that to be the case; then, come weal, come woe, high hill or cold river, or bleak wilderness or beauteous garden—come what may, God will come with it, and my life shall be a great, sweet peace.

XXIII.

GOD AND MAMMON—BE ANXIOUS ABOUT THE RIGHT THING—THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE—DR. THOMAS GOODWIN

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, truly thou dost remember thy children, and with infinite mindfulness dost thou watch thine own, in all the way that they take, in all the sufferings they undergo, and in all the purposes which form the inspiration of their life. We rejoice that there is an eye evermore looking upon us which never slumbers and never sleeps; it is our joy to believe that the arms of everlasting strength are round about us, and that the defences of omnipotence protect us from all injury. This is our confidence in God, this creates the music of our life and the hope of our gladdest expectation. We rejoice and are exceeding glad because the covenant of the Lord is written in righteousness and is signed with his own best name of love. Though the righteous stumble, he shall not utterly fall, though he be cast down, he shall not be utterly destroyed; the Lord's hand is round about him, behold his defence is greater than fire.

We have tested thy word, all thy promises have been renewed and redeemed in our own experience, we are the living to bless thee, we are the living to magnify thy name. Truly, each of us can say, "This poor man cried unto the Lord and he heard him, and delivered him out of his distresses." Thou didst find us in the deep clay and in the horrible mire, and thou hast set our feet upon a rock and lifted up our face towards the sun; thou hast hidden thy word in our hearts—it has been meat to us in the time of keen hunger, and water from heaven in the hour of distressing thirst. Thou hast made thine angels our ministering servants, and thy comforts have delighted and strengthened our souls. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? We would give him our whole life, we would spare nothing of our energy, we do but render thee thine own, for we are bought with a price, and our body and our soul are God's. We remember the price thou dost pay for our redemption, we are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ; we are the purchase of his sacrifice, we are the trophies of his redeeming strength, he is our Priest, our Sacrifice, our Reconciliation, he is our all and in all; we would see no man in our redemption but Jesus only, and lying low before his cross, hiding our mouth in the dust, by reason of infinite shame, we would hope to receive the offer and the gift of thy pardon because Jesus died for us.

We thank thee for this glorious gospel; it turns our weakness into strength, it sows the very stars of light upon the field of infinite darkness, and it brings us hope when reason brings us nothing but despair. Our trust is in Christ, our daily confidence is in his blessed cross, we flee to him for succour, for pardon, for hope, we find all we need in thy Son, our Saviour—his riches are unsearchable.

We give thee praises for all thy kindness to us during the time that has elapsed since we met together in holy fellowship at the altar. Thou hast kept our eyes from

tears, our feet from falling, and our soul from death ; thou hast renewed our youth, thou hast rekindled the lamp of our hope, our table thou hast spread, our chamber thou hast watched, our house has been surrounded by thy protecting angels. We therefore take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord, and bless him with all our love, and trust him with our whole heart. Thou hast brought some of us up from long solitude, wherein we have seen the darkness of afflicting providences ; thou hast chastened us sore, thou hast reduced our strength so that it has been turned into the weakness of water, thou hast given us to feel how frail we are and how little before thee. Yet hast thou nourished us with secret comfort and enlightened us with glory from heaven, and now that we have returned to thy house, having exchanged the chamber of affliction and solitude for the open church of enjoyment and high Christian fellowship and rapture, we thank thee for all thy mercies, we bless thee for thy gentle care. Others of us thou hast been with on land and on sea, at home and in distant places ; thou hast brought us from our wanderings to our accustomed associations. The Lord's mercy be magnified and praised in daily hymn for all this wondrous care. Thou dost number the hairs of our head, thou dost watch our steps, thou dost keep our feet from falling, thou art mindful of thine own, thy patience is long-suffering, thy love what man can measure ? We therefore praise thee, yea we bless thee, yea we magnify thee, yea with all music would we elevate thy name, and call upon our soul and all that is within us to give honour unto God, to whom we owe our life and our hope.

Let the study of thy word be useful to us to-day—may we eat of thy word as men who are hungered eat of bread, may we drink of thy word as those who are dying of thirst long for living streams. Destroy all prejudice that would hinder a right conception of thy sacred messages, release us from the anxieties and reflections and tormenting fears of this world, and give us such sympathy with light, divinity, and all things spiritual and truly beautiful, as shall enable us to regard this service as a banquet spread by the king's own hand, and may we hear his welcome and enjoy his hospitality.

The Lord's blessing, like the light of the sun, run everywhere and carry with it morning and hope and summer, and all the joy of life. The Lord visit the sick-chamber, the prison where the penitent lies, the land where the prodigal mourns his folly and curses his sin. Be with the broken-hearted, the spirit suffering in silence that dare not utter itself in mortal speech, be with the widow and the fatherless in their affliction and dumb hopelessness : be with the man who utters to-day his first prayer, with the pilgrim who is just going home, with the little child, opening like a bud in the summer morning—yea, be with every one of us, exclude none from thy blessing, that the appeal of thy love may be the beginning of our redemption. Amen.

MATTHEW vi. 24-34.

24. No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment ?

26. Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?

27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature ?

28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin;

29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek): for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

“No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” I venture to say that the true meaning of this passage has not been always represented. The common notion is that a man may *try* to serve God and mammon. Jesus Christ does not ask you for one moment to believe so flagrant an absurdity. The experiment cannot even be tried. What, then, becomes of your interpretation of your neighbour about whom you have said, many a time, “That man is trying to serve God and mammon.” The experiment does not admit of trial. You must get into the profound meaning of this word *cannot*. It indicates an impossibility even so far as the matter of trial or experiment is concerned. So the passage is a consolatory one; it is not a warning against any kind of practical hypocrisy and double-handedness—Jesus is not lifting up his voice against the ambidexters who are trying to do the same thing with both hands—he lays down, as he always does, a universal and everlasting law; ye cannot serve God and mammon, equal to—ye cannot go east and west at the same time. Have you ever tried to do that, have you ever made such a fool of yourself as to endeavour to cross the Atlantic by staying on shore? The meaning is, if a man’s supreme purpose in life be to seek God and to glorify him, whatever his business upon earth may be, he elevates that business up to the level of his supreme purpose.

Where, then, is the value of your criticism upon the rich Christian man? You have said, mockingly, “That man has served God and mammon to some purpose, for he has accumulated immense wealth.” Your reasoning I would call childish but for my fear of degrading the sweet name of child. Where a man’s heart burns with the love of God, if he be the owner of the Bank of England, he lifts up all his property to the high level of the purpose which inspires him.

I now see a new and gracious light upon the Saviour’s words. I have

cudgelled myself mercilessly in many a piece of self-discipline, by imagining with the foolish that I could be serving God with one hand and serving mammon with the other. I thought the Saviour was teaching that narrow lesson. To-day he says to me, "I lay it down as a law that the supreme purpose of a man's life gives a character to all he does."

Now let us look at the subject from the other end, and thus get double light upon it. Ye cannot serve mammon and God. The meaning is—If your supreme purpose in life be selfish, narrow, little, worldly—if your one object in life be to accumulate property, power, renown, anything that is sublunary, ye cannot serve God, though you may sing hymns all the day long, though you may attend church whenever the gates are open, though you may give your body to be burned and your goods to feed the poor.

All these are but so many mammon arrangements, without religious value. The supreme purpose of your life is to be satisfied with the things at hand, within the circumference of this world, and therefore ye cannot be religious, ye cannot serve God, God can only be served by the supreme purpose, the dominating and all-inspiring impulse that moves the heart and controls the behaviour.

Poor soul, you thought when you asked for an increase of income that the people would suspect you of being something of a mammon-worshipper. Never mind : they were cruel and foolish, and they did not know Christ's great gospel. You were no money-lover, no money-grubber, you only wanted to work your way honestly in the world, and to eat the wealth gotten by honest labour. And you, when you told that huge lie, so black that there is no paint in the darkness grim and gloomy enough to give it right character, when you said that if you had a thousand pounds more you would feed the poor and support the church and did not mean a bit of it, it was a lie you told—you were serving mammon. As the poet says of you, anticipating your coming into the world, "You stole the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in."

The passage no longer affrights me, I understand its glorious meaning now. It is impossible to go east and west at the same time : the whole law of gravitation says "No," in an instant. It cannot be done. And so if I want to be heavenly and worldly it is impossible ; if I am heavenly I sanctify the world, if I am worldly I debase the heaven. You are therefore one of two things, and there is no mixture in your character. Judge ye what I say.

Now we come again to the long and yet pithy lecture on earthliness, and its mean and fruitless anxieties. I have gone at length into that subject, yet I have something more to add. You tell me, when the Saviour warns you against thought—understanding by that word, as explained in the last lecture, cankering anxiety, killing fretfulness—that man is an anxious being ; you say that no allowance is made for that great constitutional

fact that man must forecast and provide and provide and meddle with things contingent and uncertain. You say the gospel arbitrarily forbids that which is instinctive. Let me once more correct your mistake. Jesus Christ does provide for this very instinct of anxiety ; in effect he says, "You say you must be anxious : very good, by all means be anxious ; be true to your nature, obey the law of your constitution—only this is what I have to say to you, be sure you direct your anxiety along the right lines. Do not waste your anxiety, do not make your anxiety a leak in your nature through which all that is sweetest and best may ooze." Anxious? Certainly, be anxious, but fix your anxiety upon the right object. Thus: Here is a friend who is going to take a railway journey. We will, in imagination, accompany him up to the point of starting. He has gotten everything with him that he thinks he requires. He drives to the station, he hastens to the book-stall, he is most anxious to get the last and best news. He buys papers representing every section of religious and political thought, he fills up his compartment with that varied literature. He has been most anxious about it, most fussy, almost turbulent ; he has pushed other people aside in order that he might get his favourite paper and the principal antagonist to the doctrines which he believes in. And now there he is, with his compartment almost snowed up with the literature of the morning. The train will start in a minute. "Tickets, please." He has not got his ticket. Then he cannot go—too late ; the law may run that if you have not got your ticket there is no time to get it, and you must wait for the next train. Has the man been anxious? Most anxious—about nothing, about the wrong thing. Of course I say to him "Be anxious, be vigilant, be on the alert, be on the *qui vive*, do not close your eyes and fall into a slumber ; be anxious, but be anxious about the right thing, sir." What avails it that he has stuffed his carriage with the literature of the morning and has forgotten the one thing without which he cannot go? How would you accost him, if he explained his case to you on the platform? You might audibly accost him in the language of sympathy—I fancy you would mentally accost him in a more appropriate tone.

That is precisely what many of us are doing, and Jesus Christ says : "Be anxious, most certainly, but do not waste your anxiety ; fix it on the right objects, direct it to the proper quarter and the right end ; seek, seek, seek"—and that word seek, as he spoke it, has in it agony, paroxysm, passion, importunity—"seek." O, how you did misunderstand him when you thought he forbade anxiety, and had omitted a constituent element of your nature, and had made no provision for the outgoing and association of an almost necessary anxiety. He hits the case very graphically, with a sharpness the dullest eye must see ; for he says, "Which of you by taking thought, by doing all this kind of thing, of the nature of fretfulness and peevishness, which of you by indulging in that expensive luxury, can

add one cubit to his stature?" What does it all come to in practical effect? is the meaning of Christ's doctrine. Which of you by fretting about to-morrow, planning for it and scheming about it, and worrying out your very souls concerning its fortunes and destinies, can make one hair white or black? There are rocks which your anxiety cannot melt into water; there are great rolling seas which it is not in the power of your anxiety to divide. Spend your solicitude upon the right objects; be careful about the supreme purpose of your existence: in that direction there cannot be too much solicitude. Give your eyes no rest nor close your eyelids in slumber until you have acquainted yourselves with God and become at peace with him. And remember that anxiety, improperly used, wastes your nature, dissipates your energy, incapacitates you for the discharge of the noblest duties of life.

Let us put the thing again before us illustratively. Here is a man whose son is very delicate. He has not known what it was to enjoy a day's real health since he was born. He appears to be declining day by day in strength. The father comes to us, and we ask questions concerning the child; and in reply to our inquiries the father says, "I am always most anxious that he should dress well, that his gloves should fit him like his skin, that his boots should be of the best possible quality, and that he should never go out without being so dressed as to attract the admiring attention of those who may pass him on the road." What would you think of a man who could talk so under such circumstances? Do not be hard upon him, because your admission I will take and apply to you as a whip. Do you acquit him? Remember that the judge is condemned when the guilty are acquitted.

This is the very thing we are doing, and Jesus Christ comes to us and says, "Is not the body more than raiment?" So you have said to the man described thus imaginatively, "Sir, what about your boy's health? Is he getting stronger?—is he more robust?—what can be done to establish his health? And as for his dress and his gloves and his attire altogether—all these things may be left to settle themselves. Seek ye first the establishment of the child's health."

Well, then, this Christian doctrine is not so impracticable and other-worldly. This Christian doctrine is not a metaphysical quibble in the clouds; there is downright common-sense—strong, robust, graphic common-sense about this Christian preaching. I should not wonder if this carpenter's Son seated upon the mountain talking to his disciples should turn out, in the long run, to be the world's greatest preacher. Let us not, however, anticipate, but attend him, and listen with the understanding to the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth.

It is not enough to speak against anxiety or to direct it into proper quarters. Jesus Christ, recognising this fact, proceeds to mitigate the

anxiety that eats up the life like a canker. What do you think he does in the way of mitigation? Something most beautiful. He takes us all out for a day into the open fields. It is only recently that some doctors have learned from the great Physician to get their patients out of town as soon as they could. I speak now to many doctors: stand by that rule, get your patients away out of their old associations, out of their old chambers, where they know every pattern upon the paper, and get them away to the sea, and into the country, and up the mountains and by the riversides as soon as you possibly can, and take your own course as to whether you throw physic to the dogs. This was Jesus Christ's plan: he said, "Take a walk, change your circumstances, get rid of these narrow brick walls, get into the wide fields, read the flowers, listen to the music of the birds." Was this a novel suggestion on the part of Jesus Christ? Not at all. Did he borrow from any man? No, other men borrowed from him, only he was not always the revealed and incarnate Teacher; he was the invisible and incomprehensible Inspirer of all that went before him in the kingdom of truth and light. Where do we find this recipe before? A thousand years prior to the incarnation of the peasant teacher, and a thousand years more than that. Once Zion was ill; she was bowed down to the dust; there was no more hope in her fainting heart, and Jacob was slain with an intolerable thirst. What was the recipe of the divine Physician? Nature. How did it run in English? Thus: "Lift up your eyes and behold who hath created all this." First he points to the stars, then to the lilies, then to the birds—to all nature; its infinite light, its minute flushes and blushings of colour, and its little trills of song from tiny and tremulous throats. Are you in great trouble and care and anxiety? Go away as soon as you can. First of all get a right theological conception of your circumstances and understand that anxiety is wasted energy, if it be directed to such things as lie beyond your control. And then, having taken a right theological view of the case, go away, go into the fields—there is healing in nature; she is a kind and noble mother, always ready to nurse and carry us in her generous heart. The soft wind cools our fever, the infinite light charms our despair, the great space offers us new liberties; the all-filling music, subtle as an odour wafted from distant paradises, stirs the heart to better hope. You have no money to go far away, do you say? Then go as far as you can walk. You cannot tell how healing and medicating this is. Kind Nature, Alma Mater, Loving Mother, she spreads her bounties with infinite hospitality, and by every open way to our natures she sends her healing ministries.

You now tell me that whilst you have no doubt about the doctrine, that you are confronted by certain facts which astound and distress you, facts, for example, of this kind, that good men of your own acquaintance are often in great trouble, that praying men who really and truly love God and wait

upon him are sometimes in great straits, and you are puzzled to harmonize the doctrine and the fact. There I think you occupy solid ground, and deserve a respectful answer. My reply is threefold. Trials are useful, trials often develop the best faculties of our nature, qualities that stir us sometimes into our healthiest energy. I would never have known how rich and good some friend were but for the afflictions that befell me. I have seen what I thought were pampered children, spoiled boys and girls ; I have sometimes ventured to reason with the parents as to their method of bringing up their children ; I have ventured perhaps to say, " Now, what can become of them in the event of any misfortune befalling you ? " I have seen that misfortune come, and I have seen the children of such parents turned out to make their bread, and they have done it with such noble temper, such high quality of heroism, as to affect me deeply with a consciousness of my entire ignorance of what lay hidden in their character. Those children themselves have come to bless the misfortune that battered in the roof of the old house they called their home, those children have, in some cases, traced the beginning of their best and healthiest developments to afflictions which, for the time being, distressed them with intolerable agony. I call you to witness whether you would have been the man you are to-day in wisdom, in range of experience, in mellowness, if your one ewe lamb had not been taken from you, if your fig-tree had not been barked, if your little heritage had not been shaken by the rude winds. You are the sweeter for every loss you have sustained. You are the kinder and nobler for every affliction you have rightly received, your weakness has become your strength.

Then I would remember in the second place that prosperity has its pains and trials. Do not imagine that prosperity of a worldly kind is another word for heaven. You think what you would have done if your circumstances of an outward kind had been very different. You are mistaken. Let us go into this rich man's fine house and sit in the sumptuously garnished room until he comes in. What a room it is ; I see the artist's hand everywhere. What a beautiful outlook, what noble grounds, what ancient trees, what singing birds ! The man who lives here cannot be unhappy ; surely this is the very vicinage of some better land. So you soliloquise, and when you get into confidential conversation with the occupant of that noble mansion you may find that there is a thorn under every rose, a worm at every root, bitterness in every cup, and that the house is but a garnished sepulchre. It may be so, it may not be so—still the solemn fact remains that prosperity itself is a continual temptation, a subtle and persistent trial of every virtue of the heart.

To this double reply I add another answer, namely, that God knows exactly with how much he can be trusted. If he knows what temptations we can bear, understanding that word in its narrow sense as including only

diabolic assaults on the heart, he knows also what prosperity we can bear. He gives me just what I can do with ; he that gathers much has nothing over, he that gathers little has no want. A contented spirit is a continual feast ; when the heart has rest in God there is always bread enough on the table. We think we can do with more, but God knows what we can do with, and he will see that we shall have it. Your Heavenly Father knows what ye have need of, and his knowledge is the measure of his service. I rest in that doctrine, and no fool can throw a troubling stone into the pacific lake of my profoundest confidence.

Is this a new doctrine in the church assembling in this place ? We have often reminded ourselves that the church was founded by the most learned man of his day, the illustrious Dr. Thomas Goodwin, two centuries and a half ago. What was the doctrine he preached—what kind of preacher was he ? Did he mumble platitudes that had no meaning ? Did he speak without accent, or was there a strange sharpness and an occasional tartness in his way of delivering himself ? Was he figurative, illustrative, metaphorical ? I will tell you. The other day I met with a short passage in his writings upon this very subject, and I have it before me. Let our founder speak to us, let the illustrious Goodwin come back as it were to his own pulpit and preach a homily in our hearing, and let us listen with a view of ascertaining whether the pulpit of to-day contradicts the pulpit of two centuries ago. Says Goodwin on this particular text, “To do unnecessary things in the first place and neglect those which are most necessary, and put them off to the last—is not this the part of a fool ? If a man should go to London to get a pardon, or about some great suit at law, and should in the first place spend the most or chiefest of all his time in seeing the lions at the Tower, the tombs in Westminster Abbey, or the streets and buildings of the city, or in visiting friends, and put the other off to the last—would he not be a fool ?” Why, then, this church is keeping up its old traditions, is speaking in the old, old language, is trying to be as graphic and as keen as was the man who humanly founded it. Yes, a fool. There have been some persons who have objected to the use of that word in the pulpit ; I am glad to find that our founder was not among those dainty people. We had better know exactly what is the value of our actions ; do not trifle with us, speak a plain clear language about our conduct : if we are acting foolishly do not address us in terms of mere courtesy which would convey a false impression to the mind, tell us exactly what we are and what we are doing, and then in the final day we shall not be able to turn upon our teachers with reproachful face and to pour into their ears an accusing voice.

Now what are we seeking ? What is our supreme purpose ? What is the set and ambition of our life ? Is it to glorify God ? Then all the rest will come right. Is it to glorify self ? Then nothing we do can ever

make it right. You may paint it, decorate it, visor it, mask it—it is a lie.

The Lord inspire us with the spirit of truth : may we be found at last, though faint, yet pursuing, our hands indeed weak and tremulous, but using their last energy in gripping the right plough !

XXIV.

THE NECESSITY OF JUDGMENT—SOWING AND REAPING—CENSORIOUSNESS
IN THE BEAM—THE DOGS AND SWINE OF SOCIETY—THE MOCKERY OF
LOVE.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know that thy word is truth, and that the entrance in of thy word doth give light to every heart. There is no light without thy word, nor is there any truth. We humbly pray thee to send upon us the glory of thy revelation, that seeing the light from heaven we may not mistake the things that are upon the earth. We humbly pray thee to give us a right sense of all the things that are round about us ; we mistake the small for the great and the near for the precious, and we know not where we are nor what we look at but as thy spirit dwelleth in us, giving us the right vision and the right sense of all things. Show us the glory of the Lord, so far as our eyes may be able to bear the great light ; wherein our vision fails to look upon the glory, show unto our eyes all the goodness of God. Make thy goodness pass before us, thy gentle acts, long-suffering patience, thine all-hopeful love concerning men who have smitten thee in the face, and wounded sorely thy very heart. Thus beholding thy goodness, may we be prepared for the revelation of thy glory, when thou dost call us into the other and higher state.

Thy care of us has been very tender ; thou hast dried our tears with a soft hand, thou hast spoken to our hearts in a voice that did not smite them as with thunder, but that fell with the graciousness of the early and the latter rain. Thou hast been mindful of our weakness ; wherein thou hast brought thine omnipotence to bear upon our feebleness, thou hast repeated the greatest of thy miracles. Thou hast spread our table in the wilderness, and found water for us in sandy and barren places ; thou hast put laughter into our mouth suddenly, when our life was woe-begone and the grave was yawning at our feet. Mighty have been our deliverances—thou hast taken the prey from strong hands and thou hast broken down men of great power. Thou hast delivered us and redeemed us and magnified thy name and thy grace in our life, therefore are we here to-day, this Easter morn, with a new hymn and a glowing psalm, yea, with a loud sweet anthem to bless the great and mighty hand of God and the infinite heart of his immeasurable love.

Hear thou the prayer thy servants pray ; listen to the sighing of the sad, the wounded spirit ; give peace where there has long been unrest or fierce tumult or great dejection ; grant a divine deliverance to those who have been long bound in darkness they could not penetrate ; and upon us all send some Easter blessing, some resurrectional glance of infinite glory that shall awaken our best hopes and revive our forgotten recollections, and rekindle the enthusiasm of our early love. Thou didst call us out of darkness into thy marvellous light, thou didst give unto our hearts resurrection through the cross and sacrifice of our dearly-beloved and only Saviour. Wherein we have forgotten these marvels of thy grace, do thou now revive their ten-

derest recollection, so that every heart may bless thee with a new delight, with a high satisfaction, and with an ennobled infinite hope.

We put our lives into thine hands, we would not take care of ourselves, or surely our protection would be vanity. We therefore ask thee to take us, body, soul, and spirit, into thine own keeping: watch the door of our heart, keep the source of our thoughts, and sanctify the very spring of our will and all the actions in which it expresses itself, and may we be found at last, through the blood of the Lamb, without a spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, worthy of his own beauty, worthy of his own comeliness.

The Lord send a light upon his word whensoever we read it, that we may behold its true meaning, and may not fall into the dejection of those who understand nothing but the letter. Show us that the letter is the goblet which holds the wine, and may we drink of the wine of thy wisdom and thy love, and be refreshed and inspired by it every day.

The Lord look upon us at this time of the year, with all the hopefulness of spring breathing around us, with many a sign of returning life. Thou art re-writing thy promises in every opening flower and every promising bud: behold in this revolution of the year do we see the re-writing of some of thy tenderest words. May there be spring in our heart, a vernal breeze in the soul, a gracious and hopeful light shining upon the whole breadth of our life, and in due time may we bring forth fruit unto God which shall please the Most High and gladden him who planted the vine.

We beseech thee to direct us in all the way that we should take, in view of our great responsibilities and opportunities. Enable us to see the measure of our life, and to understand the brevity of our day, and, with all the wakefulness of heart, and industry of hand, and vigilance of mind, may we be about our Father's business, and be found at last as they that wait for their Lord. Regard the family, spare the father, the mother, and all the children, kindle the fire on the cold day, spread the table to meet returning hunger, and make the bed of the afflicted, and bless its pillow with the touch of thine own hand. Regard those who are engaged in business, and help them to do their work every day with an honourable spirit and a religious purpose, and may their bread be sweet and satisfying because of the honesty through which it is procured. Bless thy servants in basket and in store, and may there be no reason for bitter anxiety because of the bread that perisheth.

Direct the nation in all the crises of its history, inspire the minds of men by thy Holy Spirit—do thou rule the raging of the seas and make the waters calm; walk thou upon every sea that has been disturbed, and breathe thy blessing upon all thy people. God save the Queen, add many unto the days of her life, establish her throne in righteousness, and clothe her reign with prosperity.

And now let us seek for a blessing coming to every heart, a consciousness of sin forgiven through the blood of the Lamb, and a happy delight in the possession of the Holy Spirit, whose it is to sanctify and to make pure with the holiness of God. Amen.

MATTHEW vii. 1-6.

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.
2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.
3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

“JUDGE not, that ye be not judged.” Do not criticise with a censorious and unkindly spirit, do not be bitter, do not be moved by the spirit of animosity and illiberality and uncharitableness. We must judge, in the sense of forming opinions and estimates of one another—that is not the kind of judgment which is forbidden in this exhortation by Jesus Christ. We may get the true meaning of the word by another use which is made of it elsewhere in the Scriptures. Thus, in John, third chapter and seventeenth verse, we read : “ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world ; ” the same word is translated *judged* in our text that is translated *condemn* in this verse. And in the twelfth chapter of John : “ I came not to *judge* the world,” to take a bitter and unkind and hostile view of it. And again we read : “ Of the hope of the resurrection of the dead am I ”—the same word—“ *called in question.* ” And once more we read : “ One man *esteemeth*—” the same word—“ one day above another: another man *esteemeth* ”—the same word—“ every day alike.” When therefore we are called upon not to judge, we are warned against the self-righteousness which condemns everybody who does not do exactly as we think they ought to do. The spirit that is condemned here is one of infallibility. Find a man who makes himself the standard of everybody's conduct, who judges everybody by himself, by what he would have done under such and such circumstances, and who gives large licence to his tongue in forming and giving opinions upon such persons, and you find the very man referred to in this exhortation. In so far as you are self-contented, self-pleased, self-righteous, in so far as you think it to be your duty to sit down upon the throne of judgment and to judge all your neighbours and the whole human race, in so far are you guilty of the spirit of judgment which Jesus Christ condemns in this text.

Jesus Christ tells you that such judgment does not fall to the ground : you are doing more than merely uttering words when you pass such judgment upon your fellow-creatures. You are not whiling away an hour, you are sowing seed which you will one day have to reap in the form of fruit, for, “ with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Do not suppose that you are merely passing an opinion upon your fellow-men, do not fall back upon your supposed innocence, and say that you merely observed or remarked so and so. You shall give an account for every idle word ; you shall be made to feel the bitterness of your own speech, the cruelty of your own judgment shall come back upon you like a devouring flame. Jesus Christ undertakes to warn men as to the consequence and issue of certain

conditions of spirit, so that no man goes forward in these matters in ignorance of what the result will be.

Let us understand what he meant by this. Did he mean, literally, "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged"?—that is to say, that some other man would pass exactly the same opinion upon us that we passed upon others. Not at all in that little narrow sense of the word. That was not the *lex talionis* which he laid down: therein he would have but repeated the old law of a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye, whereas he came to lay down a broader judgment. What, then, did the words mean? Not that we should have snarl for snarl, hostile criticism for hostile criticism, one for one and two for two, according to the number and measure thereof. He meant that somehow or other all society, the aggregated man, the all but God, would encounter us in our own spirit; people who never heard of us would somehow rise up to condemn us and reward us according to our own spirit. By some mysterious action of divine providence, society would condemn us with the condemnation we had accorded to others.

You have often been puzzled to know how it was that such and such consequences arose from such and such acts. You have wondered at the unkindness of men, at the bitterness of their judgment. Has it ever occurred to you that the reason may, possibly, have been in yourself—a reason that has been sleeping full twenty years, and is now only bearing fruit? You remember your unkindness to your father and your mother; how you sat on the throne of criticism at the fireside and condemned the whole household in a spirit of self-righteous pride? You remember what an intolerable nuisance you were in the church twenty years ago, snarling at everyone, snubbing everybody, setting up your great righteousness as a rebuke of their feeble morality—how the unkind word was always upon your tongue, and how men might feel perfectly sure that you would go along any censorious line along which they might lead. All that is now coming back to you. You have been smitten first on the one cheek, then on the other. You have been smitten on the head; society scorns you, repudiates you, views you with suspicion and unkindness and distrust. You sowed the wind, you are reaping the whirlwind; you have eaten forbidden fruit, and you are now undergoing its most painful consequences.

Find a kind man, one of noble and liberal spirit, whose thought is always of the charitable type, who cannot be gotten to say a harsh or unfeeling word about anybody—the time will come when society will throw its arms around him and take care of him and nourish and defend him. He shall reap the bountiful harvest of his own beneficence. Such a man will not be allowed to be friendless in the time of his old age: he took no pains to defend or befriend himself, he had a kind word for everybody, he had a crust of bread for the poor and a cup of water for the thirsty—he could

always be looked to for the glowing and kind word, nothing mean, bitter, selfish, hostile, unamiable, ever fell from his ruddy lips—and now in the time of his old age and decrepitude, or when any evil report maliciously arises against him, society will close around him and protect the grand old tree from the knife and the axe and the sword of those who would cleave it down.

And what is true of the kind man is true also of the bitter man. There are some persons who cannot speak sweetly. I do not altogether blame them, for their life seems to be one of the mysteries of Providence, inscrutable, wholly beyond our explanation, here and now: we can only say it were better for such that they had not been born—but they cannot speak the noble word. they cannot give you a grand beneficent judgment of any human creature or any human deed, their criticism is bitter, highly acidulated—something even worse, highly vitriolized, most pungent, and every word has in it an intent of cruel death. What will be the judgment society will pass upon such persons by-and-bye? They will get what they have given, they will reap as they have sown—let that word never be forgotten. God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Not in some little literal way of a man dealing with him as he dealt with others, but with the marvellous social influence which gets around a man to help him up or to smite and blast him. Thank God for these great promises and laws that make society secure! They give solidity to the whole constitution of humanity. We cannot play at criticism and be harmless, we cannot be censorious and then retire upon our respectability. Every bitter word you have spoken about man, woman, or child has gone out to come back again, and will smite you some day. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. This is a great law, and all human history is its exposition and justification.

Jesus Christ now proceeds to give a vivid application of these words, and to accent them as with the point of a sword. “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Are we sure that we have laid hold of the right exposition of these words in our other lessons received upon them from divers teachers? What is the beam in the eye of the judge? Does it mean that though I condemn some little fault in you I have a greater fault of my own which has not yet been discovered? I do not understand it in that light. Here is a man about whom no fault can ever be found of the usual kind, and yet he is continually judging other men, sentencing some to darkness and others to oblivion, and passing various sentences upon those who are round about him, and yet he is sober, chaste, good in all we can say about him, punctual in his church attendances, exact in his payments, of good standing in the market-place—what beam is there in the eye of such a man? Now we come to the right meaning. He is cen-

sorious : that is the beam referred to by the great Teacher. The very fact that he judges another man in an uncharitable spirit is the beam, compared with which any other fault is a mere mote or speck, a mere splinter of wood compared to a great beam of timber.

That is how Jesus Christ estimates the censorious spirit. He says it is to other faults as a beam is to a little splinter. The man is a model man in everything else so far as society knows him, exact, punctual, critical in all his relations, a more honourable man is not to be found in the marketplace, all his payments are promptly and completely made, and there is nothing at all about him except this miserable spirit of criticism upon other people, always finding fault with somebody else. Now Jesus Christ says that although he be faultless in all the ordinary senses of that term, the very spirit of censoriousness that is in him is a great beam across his eyes. Let us, then, take great care lest the very thing that we had imagined to be no fault at all is the supreme fault.

Let us illustrate this : here is a man who will slander his neighbour by the hour, and calls himself a Christian, and never doubts his own Christianity ; he sends heterodox thinkers to hell by the thousand, he whips the Unitarians into the very hottest perdition—all that he himself does is to slander his neighbour, and then engage in prayer. It never occurs to him that slander is a deadlier sin than mere intellectual error. Jesus calls the slanderous spirit a beam compared with which any other mistake is a little thin splinter. Here is a man who condemns every poor creature that is overtaken in a fault. He has no sympathy with such. The man took a glass of drink too much, lost his equilibrium, was seen in a reeling state—that circumstance is reported to the man who only indulges in slanderous criticism, and the man instantly calls for the excommunication of the erring brother from the church, not knowing that he himself is drunk, but not with wine, drunk with a hostile spirit, drunk with uncharitableness, drunk with the feeling that rejoices in the slips and falls of others. O thou hypocrite, actor, masked and visored man ! Pluck the beam from thine own eye—then shalt thou see more clearly the mote, the splinter, that is in thy brother's eye.

I would preach to myself as loudly and keenly as to any other man, herein, if so be I had been guilty of this ineffable meanness, and this most detestable of all tricks of the devil, to speak an unkind word about any human creature, to suspect the honesty of any man. If ever I have said about a brother minister, "He is a fine man in many respects, a noble creature, grand, chivalrous, kind of soul—but—" if ever I have said that *but*, God will punish me for it. I shall suffer loss therein. If my brother has fallen, and I have said, so low down in my consciousness that I could hardly hear it myself, "I am rather glad of it," God will give me a hell for that. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Have I ever said

one unkind and thoughtless word about any human creature. It has been as a beam in my eye, while your faults, even if you have been intemperate, are virtues, compared with my huge overshadowing sin.

We do not lay hold of this great truth sufficiently. We think that a little slander is of no consequence. To be called up before the church and condemned for slander! Condemn the drunkard, turn out the man who by infinite pressure has committed some sin—turn him out—certainly, and never go after him and never care what becomes of him, let a wolf gnaw him at the core—only get rid of him:—if we go home and speak unkindly of man, woman, or child, who is the great sinner, the drunkard we have just expelled, or the closely-shaven, highly polished Christian who does nothing but filch his neighbour's good name? It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. You do not know the meaning of Christ's gospel, you are not in the kingdom at all; you have learned a few words which you chatter with parrot-like accuracy, but the gospel, the all-redeeming, all-hoping, all-saving gospel, you know nothing about.

So then do not imagine that this is the case of a great drunkard speaking against some person with a much smaller fault. It is the case of censoriousness against any other fault, the slander-spirit against the whole catalogue of devilisms. Wherein then shall we wash our hearts and cleanse our souls? Perhaps I may have spoken against some men—if I have, I shall yet feel the rod of the divine vengeance upon my life. Thou art inexcusable, O man! whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. That is the meaning of the Saviour's teaching. Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself. To judge is to condemn. Cleanse the church of this spirit of bitterness and its orthodoxy will take care of itself. O I cry before Christ sometimes, when I see him very clearly—I just fall right down at his feet and cry, and tell him that the people are most anxious about their intellectual views, and would curse any number of people who did not subscribe their catechism, and take a keen delight in damning and ramming them down in the deepest and hottest hell—but, O Thou wounded One! when they get together they have not a kind, noble, hopeful word to speak of any creature that differs from them. "Then," saith he, "they have a beam in their eye, compared with which the faults of others may be but splinters." Why dost thou judge thy brother, why dost thou set at naught thy brother, for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

Now let us come to verse 6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." Now here is the spirit of judgment: how am I to know which is the dog, how am I to know how

to classify those who are no better than swine—is not this the very spirit that has been condemned? No, we are not now talking about men who belong to the same universe. We have been speaking, or hearing Christ speak, rather, about brother's treatment of brother; we are now hearing him speak about the treatment of those who neither understand nor appreciate our heart's best life. The word *brother* now drops out of the criticism and other words are imported into the consideration of the case. Jesus Christ when he went before Herod would not give that which was holy unto the dogs, neither would he cast his pearls before swine. You must speak your deepest thinkings to the ear of sympathy, you must find out who has the spirit of communion with your spirit, when you come to utter the profoundest feelings and highest aspirations of your heart. Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words. Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee, rebuke a wise man and he will love thee.

You know what it is to be in want of sympathy. You have a great grief, and you say, "To whom can I tell this?" If I tell it to one, I get it all back again, as if I had spoken to a rock; if I tell it to another kind of heart, why the very telling of it seems to be a kind of evaporation by which my oppressed spirit is relieved. Do not speak the deepest secrets of your soul to those who have never been in the same mental or spiritual condition: they will think you erratic, romantic, eccentric—they will pity you: when they go away from hearing your tale they will intimate that your mind is a little unsettled, and that they have their fears about you. They do not understand the graphic language of your tragic experience, they have never been in the same darkness, never fought the same battle, never drunk of the same bitter cup; therefore, when you come near them, speak not: silence is better than speech in such society—give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you, and you hear that your most sacred feelings have been travestied and your most solemn words have been mocked.

We have all had experience of this kind, it may be, in some degree: we have told what we thought was a friendly heart some bitter thing that was troubling us very much, and it has actually come back to us in the form of a falsehood, that has turned again and rent us. Hast thou a friend? Treat him as such, bind him to thine heart with hooks of steel, tell him everything: he will divide thy burdens, he will double thy joys. Beware of the unsympathetic ear, beware of the unsympathetic heart: thou wilt get nothing from those but trampling and rending.

Now some may say, having heard this preaching of Jesus Christ, "Where is the gospel? There is not a word of gospel in all the sermon which Jesus Christ has preached to us this morning. There is nothing evangelic,

there is nothing doctrinally savoury, there is no old wine of blood. Seneca might have said this, it might have been written in old Latin." You think so? You try to carry out the injunction of the text, and ere you have gone two steps in the direction of its accomplishment you will want Christ and the cross, and the blood and the Holy Ghost, for this is the last and chiefest of the divine directions.

This teaching, some may say, is purely negative; it is telling us what not to do. You try to realize the doctrine and you will see how far it is merely negative. If you sit within the narrowness of the letter you may call it a negative kind of teaching, but if you try to carry it out in your life, if you never more have to slander a man, think or speak unkindly about any human creature, you will soon know whether the doctrine is negative or positive. It is courageous, for the Scribes and the Pharisees were the princes of slander, and of malicious hostile criticism; it is spiritual, for it searches the heart, and lays down a principle which cannot be carried out by mere mechanism. This is not a trick in handicraft, this is an outgoing and blossom of the renewed heart: it is practical, there is nothing sentimental in this, this is the eloquence of action.

If you, from this time forth, could show the spirit of charity, you would strike the mocker dumb. He has his best hold upon us when he hears us criticising one another. He says, "See how these Christians love one another." When he hears ministers undervaluing one another, running down each other's preaching and methods of work, he says, "See how these Christians love one another." When he hears various communions of Christians traducing one another, proving one another wrong, and excommunicating one another, he says, "See how these Christians love one another." When he comes to a cemetery and sees a chapel on one side on consecrated ground and a chapel on the other on unconsecrated ground, he laughs a laugh, he has a right to laugh, and says, "See how these Christians love one another."

My friends, it has too long been the case of orthodoxy *versus* heterodoxy, trinitarian *versus* unitarian, citadel against tower, and A against B. "Thou hypocrite," says the great Teacher, "thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam of hostile judgment and uncharitable criticism out of thine own eye; then shalt thou see more clearly to cast out the little splinter that is in thy brother's eye."

XXV.

THE CONDITIONS OF PRAYER—THE TEXT AND THE CONTEXT—THE
FILIAL RELATION TO GOD—MUCH GIVEN WITHOUT PRAYER—THE
BLOSSOM AND FRUIT OF HISTORY.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou send a plentiful rain upon thine inheritance, and make this people rejoice with great joy. Do thou nourish us and comfort us with the bread of heaven, and with all the tender solaces of thine heart. Our life is in thine hand and not in our own, our days thou dost number, and our appointments thou dost make, yea, the day of our birth and the day of our death are both set down in the book which is open before thee. Thou hast assured us of thy presence, if we cry for it mightily through Jesus Christ our Priest and Saviour; for thy presence we do now cry, yea, our whole heart gathers itself up into one vehement desire that we might know where to find thee, that we might come into thy presence, that thou mightest dwell with us, and abide with us, and bear dominion over our whole life. This is our prayer, and to it thou hast but one answer: thy reply is an answer of love, thou wilt not deny the request of the heart that begs thy presence, through all the wondrous ministry of the Cross.

Thou hast kept us and not we ourselves; thou hast lighted our lamp, and the strong wind has not blown it out; thou hast established us in sureness, and behold the storm has vanished and we are still alive. It is because the good hand of the Lord our God is upon us that we are continued unto this day with root unshaken and branch unbroken, and with all the spring light pouring its tender blessing upon us, every beam a prophecy and every ray a blessing. We are in thine house now to eat and to drink according to the abundance of thine own welcome; we bring our hunger and our thirst where they can alone be satisfied. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and as for the river of God it is full of water, and if a man drink thereof he shall thirst no more. Whilst we are in thine house may the light fill our life, may the love of the cross burn in our hearts, may the infinite work of thy Son our Saviour disclose unto us all the beauteousness and all the sufficiency which he intended it to disclose. May our hearts glow with a new ardour, may our spirits rise with still higher and purer aspiration, may our heart go out after the Living One in cries of distress and yet of hope, until thou dost come to every heart amongst us, and make it thy chosen dwelling-place.

Few and evil have been the days of thy servants upon the earth, yea, though they be counted as many among men, yet has their number been few in thy sight and evil in our own. Behold we are of yesterday and know nothing, we are afraid of the dust, we tremble before the shadow, we turn away from the stroke of thy rod, and our hearts are melted with fear like water. Do thou therefore visit us in our weakness and come as the physician comes to men that die, and breathe upon us with all gentle-

ness, subduing the wind of thine infinity, breathing upon us thy tender blessing. We are bruised reeds, unfit for music ; do thou bind up our wounds and heal us and then breathe into us, and may our answer be one of gentle music. We are as smoking flax, we flicker before thee like a flame and die. O, that thou wouldst breathe upon it, and strengthen the fire by thy breathing, until our whole nature is aflame and aglow with thy presence ; then would our life be always in the Sabbath, and our whole hope would be set upon things invisible.

Pity us in our sorrows and distresses, do not mock us in our miscalculations and follies, do not discourage us with bitter taunting from heaven when our own souls misgive us and we are afraid to try the good again ; but with all gentleness and comfortableness do thou encourage us once more to do that which is right and to attempt that which is holy, and with every attempt do thou give increase of strength.

The Lord visit us according to the breadth and depth of our painful necessity. What every heart needs thou knowest : the prayer we dare not speak thou hearest ; the gentlest knocking at thy door is heard as thunder in thine house. When we seek may we find. Thou knowest what we would be, what we would have, and what we would do, and we lay this before thee in uttered words or in silent desire, and we would desire to say at last, having completed the tale of our want and the prayer of our ignorance, " Nevertheless, not our will but thine be done." Amen.

MATTHEW vii. 7-12.

7. Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you :

8. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone ?

10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?

11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?

12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets.

So, then, the commerce between earth and heaven is perfectly honest and straightforward. There is nothing of moral jugglery about it. The wayfaring man, though a fool, may read these plain words and understand them. Do not attempt to steal anything from heaven ; ask for it. Do not try any illegitimate methods of getting, finding, or anything else. The plan is simple, honest, perfectly intelligible and available to every sincere and simple-minded heart. Did you suppose that any man got aught from heaven by a species of legerdemain ? Has it ever entered into your heart that some man was richer in spiritual graces than you are because he deluded God ? Such is an infinite mistake on your part : the human side of this transaction is beautiful in its simplicity—ask, seek, knock. You thought religion was an affair of mystery,—deep and dark clouding, and impenetrable haze. It is the commerce between a child and his father. There is no mystery whatever about it, it is honest commerce. The bread

we get from heaven we get honestly : you are not ill-used if you have not got that bread : ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.

It is something to know that the human side of this transaction is perfectly intelligible and simple, and it is something to know that the human side of this transaction is that which applies to all our progress in life whatsoever it be, in so far as it is honest, substantial, and really good and durable. There is no particular masonic word to get hold of, nor is there any Eleusinian grip of the hand to learn. This is not a trick in the black art ; it is asking, receiving—seeking, finding—knocking and having the door opened in reply to the appeal. All religion will be found at last, in so far as it is true, to be equally simple, equally to illustrate the law of cause and effect. The mystery that we find in the Christian religion we too often bring to it : it is but a gilding of the cloud of our own ignorance. The way of the Lord is equal, and his path among men is often such as can be apprehended by sanctified intelligence.

“ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” If you want your income increased, ask for it ; if you want your health re-established, seek the Physician—God, the one Healer, in whose heart grow all plants with healing juice flowing in their salubrious veins. If you want to advance in life knock at the door, and while you are knocking it shall be thrown open to you. There is no condition specified, there is no particular class of persons identified as the favoured sect or denomination—for every one that asketh receiveth. There is no condition of title, character, claim : words cannot be more simple and more inclusive. If you want increase, health, joy, satisfaction, advancement, riches, honour—ask, and ye shall receive, for every one that asketh receiveth. Why sit we here, therefore, poor dwarfs, empty of pocket, feeble of hand, blind of intellect, failing in health, crushed before the moth and the worm, and courting with cowardly spirit our own grave, that we may be hidden from the light of the day ? Nothing lies between me and what I want but honest supplication. Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication make known your requests unto God. Never mind how bad you are—you have simply to ask what you like and you shall have it.

There is not one word of truth in that statement, and yet who would wonder if some persons who read the Bible in fragments and morsels should openly and emphatically declare that to be the divine revelation. Learn to trust not only in the text but in the context. What I have now laid down to you would seem to be the very first meaning of the words I have read. That meaning seems to be written upon the very face of the text, and yet every sentence I have uttered in the latter part of the exposition is utterly false. How can that be proved to be so ? By Christ's own

words. But is there any condition signified in the text? Most undoubtedly there is a vital condition, not only signified but explicitly laid down in so many words. You must not break in on the Saviour whilst he is preaching and teaching; you must hear his whole statement and compare part with part, and by comparing one part with another you must establish the truth which he came to reveal and enforce. Let us, therefore, look at the illustration which he himself gives of the doctrine which he has laid down.

“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent?” Then there is a certain class specified in the text? Undoubtedly. What is that class? “What man is there of you whom if *his son* ask bread.” It is a filial relation, it is a child praying to his father. It is not an alien, a stranger, a rebel, it is a child’s heart praying a child’s prayer. What further condition is there specified in the text? The next condition laid down in the text is that what we ask for is good. Read again. “What man is there of you whom if his son ask *bread*, or *fish*, or *egg*.” Why, these are necessary to life. You talked just now about asking for a double income, and a larger house, and fifty more fields added to your small estate. No, no—the doctrine relates to bread fish, egg—food—necessaries of life, and it is the son that prays. So, then, the foolish man who first ran away with the idea that we only had to go and ask and have, is altogether disqualified for the exposition of this portion of Scripture. He talks a foreign tongue, he utters the fool’s swift language that hath no faith or sense in it. The strong limitation, the definition of boundary that is not to be trespassed, is—Son, as the suppliant: Bread, Fish, Egg as the subjects of petition. Bodily nutriment, intellectual nutriment, spiritual nutriment, the bread, the fish, the egg applied to all the necessities of our multifold hunger and thirst that evermore besiege and urge and distress our nature. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs. Dog, you cannot pray. This is a portion of meat for the king’s children; it is a special household that sits down at this table and eats and drinks abundantly of this divine hospitality.

“What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent,” and elsewhere, “if he ask an egg will he give him a scorpion?” What is the great deduction of the divine Teacher? “If ye then, being evil, short-sighted, mean-hearted, children of miscalculation, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” This is the true method of teaching, climbing up step by step from the human to the divine. Said I not unto you ye are gods? Learn from the little divinity that is in yourself, O man, the infinite divinity that is in God. When you are at your very best, in love, pity, sacrifice, care for others, multiply that condition of heart by infinity, and

the result will be your Father which is in heaven. Let common-sense assist you in all these expositions, and you will have no difficulty in getting down to the root.

Look at the case of your own family to-day, and your child shall come and say to you, "Give me your most precious possession." What would be your reply to the little child? Would it be an instant imparting of the gift? Nothing of the kind. Your child shall come to you and say, "Let me go out all to-day and all to-morrow, and never you ask where I am or what I am doing. Now I have asked you, you give." What would you say to your seven-year-old little boy who came with that prayer? If ye then, being evil, children of the night, and of the bewildering shadows, unable to see straight and clear, know how to say "No" under the inspiration of love, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven say "No" to your poor prayers, your mean and ignorant supplications, your asking for scorpions under the supposition that they are eggs? For the naturalist tells us that the scorpion coils itself up so as to look very like an egg; hard-hearted would be our Father in heaven, having heard our prayer when we have mistaken a coiled scorpion for an egg, if his answer would be the reply of death.

How do I stand then towards this Giver? Just as a child stands towards a wise father. Why, sometimes a father says to a child, when the child asks for more bread, "You have had enough, child." The father does not begrudge the bread, he delights in the child's appetite for food, but having some regard to the child's capacity and health, he may, even in that direction, interpose the suggestion that the boundary has been reached. Is he therefore cruel? Is he therefore unkind? He may simply be wise and thoughtful, a prudent father whose love asserts itself even in the form of prohibition. Is he a wise father who lets his child do exactly what the child wants to do, who gives a hearty "Yes" to every appeal of the child, who has no will of his own, no love, no firmness? What can become of a child brought up under such loose government, if the word government in that connection be not wholly a misapplication of the word? The child will come to ruin. It is not love that suspends discipline, it is love that adjusts it, measures it, lifts it into a sacrament, making it holy, often straining the sensibilities of him who enforces or inflicts it, but under the sweet and bright hope that its infliction will terminate in health and blessing. We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much more be subject unto the Father of spirits and live?

So we find the element of character and discipline and prohibitive wisdom even in this domain of supplication and desire. Be sure you ask for good things and your answer shall be plentiful; and thank God that he says "No" to some prayers. I have gone, as no doubt you have, with

prayers to God to be sent, or to be spared, or to be directed thus and so, and if the answer had been "Yes" we should not have been living men to-day. Let us, therefore, learn to put our prayers into the court of heaven, and having delivered them word by word, it may be sometimes with strong crying and tears, as if our life depended upon an instant reply, let us learn to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Read again. "Ask, seek, knock." That might be the development of one action; these may not be three distinct services on our part, but this line may mark the growing intensity of our religious application. Ask—the easiest and simplest of exercises: seek—implying more industry and anxiety: knock—suggestive of vehement desire and perhaps impatience of spirit and eagerness of will and resoluteness. Our prayer has passed through all these transitions. Hear the good man's wise, rich prayer, how he asks in quiet, deep, fluent speech, how he passes on into seeking, stooping, lighting a candle and sweeping the house diligently, as if in search of that which is more precious than gold. See how he betakes himself to one supreme effort, laying down torch and broom, and going with both hands to the door of heaven, and knocking as if God had hardly time to open the door, because the wolf was so near. It is one grand prayer, beginning with the ease of a child's communion, ending with the resoluteness and the violence of a man who feels that time is dying and opportunity closing swiftly.

Do you know all the manners of prayer? Is your prayer quite an easy exercise, or does it strain the soul and awaken the highest efforts? Look how much we have that we do not ask for, and that does not come as the result of our seeking, knocking, or any variety of our supplication and appeal to heaven. And yet they must have come in answer to some word that is equivalent to prayer. For example—all the light of day: the sun does not come out of his eastern chamber because some suppliant begged that he might return. And all the beauty of the spring, the luxuriance of the summer, the infinite largess of the autumn—these are not God's "Amens" to your small petitions, they are divine anticipations of human necessity, they are answers before the prayer is spoken—he prevents us with his goodness, and his goodness should lead us to repentance. And we learn from the infinitude of his gifts, laid upon our life without our asking, how to utter big prayers, vast petitions, petitions worthy of himself.

Have we not, poor drivelling souls, measured our prayers by ourselves, and only stretched our supplications over the mean breadth of our own conception of life? When shall we learn to fill our mouth with great words and to utter prayers meant for heaven? Ye have not, because ye ask not. God says, "Bring your vessels, and the oil shall flow." More vessels, more oil; more still, and still more oil. Who gives up? Man.

He says, "I have no more vessels"—and God causes the oil to cease its flow. Never did God say, "There is no more oil;" it is always man that says, "There is no more room."

I have spoken of the gift of the light of the day, I have spoken of the beauty and richness of the succeeding seasons, but these are mean gifts. He who gave them gave us without our asking—Christ. And he that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Christ did not come in answer to prayer, the cross was not set up because some ardent heart desired its elevation; Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, God's answer to God's own prayer. So also is the gift of our life and all its responsibilities; we did not ask to live, we did not ask for one talent, or two, or five: I did not ask to be preacher or teacher, you did not ask to be merchantman or writer or thinker, or leader of human opinion—we are what we are in all these matters of capacity and appointment by the grace or wisdom of God.

So then there is a region in which prayer seems to be uncalled for, or to be utterly without opportunity and avail. The gifts of God in nature, in redemption, in life, in responsibility, these are determined by his own will and not by our prayer. Yet there are, in relation to our life, many interstices which are to be filled by our own supplications and prayers. A man comes to feel somewhat of the range of his own capacity, then he besieges the throne of grace for direction, sanctification, and for the upholding and comforting of holy grace that he may not waste his life, pouring it out like a plentiful rain upon the unanswering sand. The man comes to find that he was born into the world with feeble constitution, with an irritable temperament, with physical defects or excesses that require the continual vigilance of his heart and the continual sanctification of God. There he begins to pray, God having in all things left an opening for prayer. There be those who pray for fine days—I do not now: all days are fine. There be those who pray for health: I would like to live to be able to pray for health with this supplement to my prayer—Nevertheless, if sickness be better for me, the Lord make me sick every day.

Now the Saviour comes to his last word. Let me ask you to read it. "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." Who has an eye acute enough in vision to see the connection between this *therefore* and the argument that has gone before? It startled me: I did not know that the argument stretched itself beyond the eleventh verse—"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more——." Said I, "The argument ends with that enquiry," and behold in the twelfth verse I was challenged with a great *therefore*, as if the syllogism did not complete itself until we came to this conclusion—"All

things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." What has that to do with the subject? "Evidently nothing," say you. "Evidently much," says Christ. This is no incoherence on the part of the divine Teacher. He does sometimes startle by taking what are called new departures, but in this *Ergo* he stands steadily by the argument he has been establishing. Let us read it with the intent of discovering his meaning.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children—the good gifts being indicated in the ninth and tenth verses—what man is there of you whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone? None. Therefore, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, giving you bread when you ask bread, and not a stone. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? No. Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, in answer to your prayers, never giving a serpent for a fish, a stone for bread, a scorpion for an egg, do ye even so to them. How would you feel, if asking your father for an egg, he gave you a scorpion? Would he not disqualify himself for the paternal relation? Therefore go by your own judgment, follow out your own reasoning—if you would not receive a scorpion for an egg, as an act of love and of honour, never perpetrate that bitter and disastrous irony in your own dealings with mankind, for this is the law and the prophets—this is the blossom, this the fruit of all history: it grows up into this, blossoming into love and fructifying into noble charity and honour.

Does not this seem a small result for so great a prophecy? Did it require thousands of years to grow this tree and to mould and mellow, in complete sweetness, this fruit? What is the fruit? Love. All the law is fulfilled in one word—Love. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. For this the ages have travailed in birth, and this the child—Love. This is the law and the prophets.

Where are you? Still in the region of opinions—still discussing tiny metaphysics, still asking one another about your little narrow hazy theological views? I despise you, if you mean to rest there, chaffering and chattering about your denominational peculiarities and your metaphysical and theological distinctions, your orthodoxy and your heterodoxy, your *isms* and your *ations*. If you are there and still mean to stop there, I want to go on. What to? Love. Again and again remember that Love is the fulfilling of the law. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? I am more anxious to cure the disease of your affections than to correct your purely intellectual mistakes. Believe what you may intellectually, if your spirit be not bathed in the very love of God you have not entered into the inner places of the holy kingdom. This blessed love is often the best guide of the intellect. It makes men modest, it

prostrates them in the lowliness which is acceptable to God, and it expels from the heart every passion that would contest the supremacy of Christ. I do not call you to brilliance or grandeur of intellect, but I do most strenuously exhort you to follow in the upward direction that is ever taken by the spirit of heavenly love.

XXVI.

THE STRAITNESS OF THE GATE—SEEKING AND NOT ENTERING—THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT—THE EXHORTATION.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our hearts know thee, and in their deepest love is thy name set as their one jewel and treasure. We cannot understand thee, but we can love thee ; thou dost not come into our intelligence or sit down in our understanding, thou knockest at the door of our heart, and into its love thou dost come with all readiness, bringing with thee all heaven. Our hearts are towards thee to-day in great expectancy, we have assured ourselves that this is thy day, and that thou wilt make a temple of every heart, and sit down with every one of us, and make us see thy life. It is not to such expectancies thou dost return some cold reply, thou dost come with swiftness to hearts that are waiting, for the sigh is contrite and the groan is one because of heavy and intolerable sin : where the eyes of our hearts are set towards the cross of thy Son, thou dost come with wings outstretched, flying faster than the lightning, that thou mayest heal and comfort and mightily redeem. We come to thee with our love shaped into an earnest prayer, with our hearts crying after the living God with infinite desire.

We have tested the poverty of time, we have seen the little boundaries which encircle and imprison us, and our souls are filled with infinite discontent because of the meanness of space and time. We would look beyond, we would be drawn by mighty forces that are above, we would yield ourselves to ministries that have no sufficient name, plying the heart with subtle tenderness, luring the affections with mighty strength, promising our love and our whole capacity an ample and sweet satisfaction in regions beyond the line of time.

We bless thee for thy sacred Book, behold it is written with thine own finger ; we see no human writing in it. Beyond the human scribe we see the divine inspirer, we hear in human words music that is not of earth, we see in the beauty of thy revelation a light that never fell from created suns. Help us to enter into the sanctuary of thy word and richly to enjoy thy revelation, and may our hearts abound with loving thankfulness to thee for putting into our speech something of the meaning and purpose of thine own heart. Help us to read thy Book wisely, save us from the narrowness and poverty of the mere letter, may the letter of thy Book be but as a door opening upon boundless spaces and liberties, and may we enter in and enjoy the heritage of a glorious and indestructible freedom.

Thou knowest our life : what is it but a breath in the nostrils, a flying shadow, a dying vapour, a post hastening on his way ?—behold we are as the grass that is consumed in the oven, and in our strength there is no duration, our joys are bubbles upon the stream that burst, and what we gather are but flowers plucked, and that must wither. Help us then to lay up treasure in heaven ; may Christ be our wealth, may the Son of God be our chief possession ; having him in the heart, dwelling in the

mind, ruling the will, directing every step of our life, we shall be rich with inexhaustible treasures. Enrich us, thou Son of God.

As for our sin, who may name such blackness? But thou hast light enough to drive it all away. Who dare speak of guilt so deep and dark? But the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin, so where great sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound; as in the darkness we see the stars, so in our great sorrow, when the tears big and hot fall from our reddened eyes, do thou therein shine upon them a divine light which makes them gleam with many a tender colour. O thou who dost forgive, who has paid a ransom for men, and whose delight it is to release from the torment and the shame of sin, come to every heart to-day with pardon and its attendant liberty.

Look upon those hairs that are grey, that are bent before thee with the reverence of age, and supply the old man with what he needs of grace and light and help. Thou hast chastened him with many an affliction, thou hast dug many a grave on his life path, thou hast startled him by many a fear—now let the evening be quiet, take the storm out of the clouds and fill them with hopeful life. Look upon all the young men and women full of life and fire, whose every look is an expectation, whose every word is a vow of nobler life, and grant unto such increasing power of prayer, increasing energy to overthrow every temptation. Hide within young hearts thy living word, an eloquence that cannot be answered, a reply to which the devil can return no answer. Look upon the busy man lest he be so busy as to let the King pass by, lest he seek in the dust and find nothing there but a pit for his body. The Lord help us all to earn our bread honestly, give us plenty of it, no more than is good for us; and as for our house, do thou keep the key of its principal door, and upon the windows pour the smiling light of thy blessing. Be with us in the cradle, be with us in the market-place, be with us in the school and in the church and everywhere; may every step we take be a step in the right direction.

Bless the stranger within our gates, the heart that is far from home, between whose love and the objects of it there roll mighty seas or stretch innumerable miles; by the spirit of thy love make the fellowship complete, destroy all space and time, and give the joy of spiritual communion.

Send messages from thy heavens to our sick-chambers. Some whom thou lovest are sick, and thou lovest them to be sick because out of their sickness thou wilt work a better health. The Lord be their Physician and their comforter, and a light above the brightness of the sun be in their darkened chambers.

The Lord will not forget the prodigal, the wanderer, the man of the hard heart, those who are invincible by any power of ours—the Lord's hand be upon them, not for destruction, but for salvation, and bring gladness into our hearts by the intelligence that they have arrived at home.

Dry our tears, make our poverty an occasion of thy coming to us, may our blindness be the reason of thine approach, and do thou dwell in us and make us living temples. Amen.

MATTHEW vii. 13, 14.

13. Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat

14. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

THIS is rather a mournful view, not only of human life, but of the king-

dom of heaven itself ; as if it would be thinly populated, and give us at last rather a representation of infinite failure on the one side than of real success and completeness on the other. That, however, would be a wrong exposition of the text. There is more light in it than seems to flash upon the eye at the first look. There is really nothing novel or unintelligible in the principle which is here laid down, namely, that, because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, few there be that find it. We know that to be a true principle in the common walks and ranges of life. It is the principle which applies at home, in the school, in the market-place, everywhere in fact ; the principle, that is, that according to the value of any kingdom is the straitness of the gate which opens upon it. If you will accustom the mind to that thought for a moment or two, you will not be struck by any novelty, certainly, by any harshness in the conditions which are attached to entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Into what kingdom is it that you are anxious now to enter ? Above all things you wish to enter into the kingdom of music. Very well. This is the New Testament doctrine concerning the kingdom of music. "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto excellence in music, and few there be that find it." You have to study night and day, you have no time for yourself, you are at it, always at it, or getting ready for it, criticising or being criticised, repeating, rehearsing, going over it again and again, still higher and higher. If that is the law of your little kingdom of music, why should it not be the law of the larger kingdom of life, which includes all beauty, and learning, and music, and power ? Show me any musician that is ever really and completely satisfied with his own attainment ; in that proportion will he be no musician at all—an amateur, easily satisfied with himself. When Handel composed his "Messiah," and sat a long way off to hear it, he came again and again to some of the players upon the wind instruments, and said, "Loudaire ;" and again he came and said, "Loudaire," and away he went, and came again and said, "Loudaire ;" and at last they said, "Where is the wind to come from ?" He wanted all the winds of heaven, and all the thunders that slumbered in the clouds, and all creation to take up his Amen and sing it, till the universe vibrated with its infinite life.

What is the kingdom that you are most anxious to enter into ? "I am," say you, "most anxious to enter into the kingdom of painting, pictures, the mystery of colour, the language, subtle and infinite, that expresses itself through the medium of colour." Is it easy ? You shake your head in despondent reply, and say that you seem to get worse rather than better. At first you were rather pleased, and now you could tear up the canvas—it vexes you by the vulgarity you write upon it with your clumsy fingers. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto art, and few there be that find it. My young friend, do not imagine that you

can jump into eminence : if you can jump into it, you may easily jump out of it. Character must be a growth, long-continued and patiently cultivated. One of yourselves took me into his study the other day, and said, "I want you to look at this sketch." Said I, "This lies a long way from your range of studies." "Yes," was the reply—"my temptation is towards impatience ; I get tired of things, and I at the last lump them and hasten them through, becoming utterly careless towards the close. I undertook this work to teach me patience, slowness, and completeness of toil. How long do you think I was over that?" "I cannot tell how long." "I spent upon that two hours every day, Sundays excepted, for two months." A little thing about the size of the palm of your hand : he could have done it in half the time, but then he would have missed the direct purpose of his attempting to do it. He must straiten the gate and narrow the road, because he wants to go into a kingdom that is worth going into, and there is no kingdom worth having that you can snatch and pocket, and keep without equivalent toil or thought.

Do you want to enter into the kingdom of influence, do you want to be a man that shall be consulted in difficulties, to whom people shall come in hours of perplexed thought, to whom they shall state their cases, and for whose opinion they shall anxiously wait? Influence comes out of time, care, experience, and these things are not to be hurried. A man, well-known to most of us, is lying sick to-day, and a physician of renown was called in to see him not long ago ; the doctors, having heard the opinion of this eminent man, declined, one and all, to give his own conception of the case. Why is it so amongst you that if a great physician gives his opinion, you will not give yours? "Yes—there is no opinion after his." The man grows to that—do not suppose that you can dream yourselves to that. Inspiration there is in it, no doubt, but a man has to work for it, and pay for it, and climb his way to it, one round of the ladder at a time. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto supreme influence, and few there be that find it.

I have troubled you with these illustrations, just to show that really there is nothing novel, extraordinary, or harsh in the principle that, according to the value of any kingdom that you aim to reach, is the straitness of the gate and is the narrowness of the road leading unto it. It is my wont—bear me witness if you please—always to speak a word for the weak man. Have I ever put out a finger and laid it upon any soul as a burden that was trying to be better? Cheer me by telling, what is only the truth, that I may have erred in excess of charity, never in excess of severity. Comfort me with these words, tell me you have so understood me, and I shall preach to you with a broader and warmer love. I want to do so with peculiar tenderness just now.

Enter ye in at the strait gate—or, as we read elsewhere, strive to enter

in at the strait gate, seek to enter in, labour to enter in, agonize to enter in. The fear is that some of you may imagine that striving is conquest, and you may visit upon a man who is merely, though with all his heart, striving to enter in, the judgment that you would accord to him after he had passed the gate, and had walked long miles up the heavenly steep. You have been cruel to some of your friends, you have taunted them with bitter mockery when they have been striving to enter in; you thought they had already professed to have entered, and you have mocked them with bitterness; you have asked them if that was their goodness, you have taken up little specks of their life, and said, "Aha, is this a sample of your piety?" It was only a sample of their agony, it was only a pattern of their striving. It was not to be picked up as a trophy of conquest, but to be referred to as an incident in the great agony of striving to enter in.

When the young Christian slips and falls, don't mock him; when a man is labouring, even in agonistic earnestness, to be better, and when in the midst of it all he gets tripped up, and somehow or other falls down as he were dead drunk at your feet, he may be a better man than you are: you never got wrong socially—you may be the worst man alive for anything I know to the contrary, you proud Pharisee, you whitewashed sepulchre, you trick undiscovered—take care lest ye be wounding good men who have the true seed in them, but who, peculiarly constituted, fall twenty times a day, and have the devil's iron teeth crushed—crushed—through them, all over. I do not defend their vices, I sympathise with their weakness; I have known the prayers of such men, and to no other prayers have I ever added so cordial an Amen—prayers that had blood in them, and music subtle and far brought and far sounding, prayers of the very inmost soul; and I did not judge them harshly, I saw they were striving to enter in, seeking to enter in, agonizing to enter in, and the measure of their earnestness was the measure of the diabolic assault upon them. If I speak to such hearts now, when possibly I may do so, let my word be one of the broadest cheer, a great sun-like word, brightening upon their lives with infinite hope. Still strive to enter in, and God will be pitiful to you.

But we read that some will seek to enter in and shall not be able. That we read in another gospel than the one we are now expounding. How singular it is then that some shall seek to enter in and shall not be able. Is not this a mockery of human effort? How many persons have been puzzled by that expression, and have gone to their pastors and teachers with it, as men would go with a great pain, and said, "Can you heal this mortal agony? I am discouraged because it says some will seek, yea, many will seek, to enter in and shall not be able. I may be one of the many—God help me. Tell me if it is so: I feel this thought darkening upon me like a cloud of thunder." O distressed one, shall I call thee Fool and slow of heart to believe all that the Speaker spake when he uttered

these words that give thee trouble? The answer is in the very next verse—When once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, “Lord, Lord, open unto us,” and he shall answer and say unto you, “I know you not whence ye are.” The seeking and the knocking referred to take place when the day of mercy is no more. When the good man of the house has risen up and gone to rest, when Christ is risen from the mediatorial seat and has delivered up the kingdom unto God and his Father, then the shout of agony shall die in space, and the cry of despair shall be the awful music of hell.

The words, therefore, do not apply to you at all. The good man of the house has not risen and shut the door, the Son of God has not completed his priestly ministry, Jesus Christ is still able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, God still waits to be gracious, the door is set wide open, and, therefore, the verse which before was a burden to you and a great darkness may now be lifted off your shoulder and chased away, to the last shadow of it, from your life path, for it never referred to any man who earnestly sought the Lord while he might be found, and called upon him while he was near. What say you to seeking now, and striving? What if we make this day the most memorable day in our life by sending the heart out like a living bird to such a rest in God? Let thine heart fly God-ward, poor soul; do thou gather thyself up into one flaming prayer, and say, “God be merciful unto me a sinner,” and thy joy shall be too great for words, thy rapture shall leave even music behind it, as the lark leaves under his wings the clouds of the smoking city. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.

“Few there be that find it.” Do not judge success by numbers. It is always pleasant to see great numbers gathering round the standard you set up, but always remember that quality is better than quantity, the audience may be fit though few. They are strong men who gather themselves around Christ, for they have nothing to rest upon but inspiration; no property, no ancestry, no fine clothing, no parchments, nothing but the grace of God. Jesus Christ never sought to make his kingdom popular in the sense of bringing into it any and everybody that casually applied for admission. A young man once came to him and said, “I would like to enter in at the gate;” and Jesus Christ said, “Why not? This gate is a strait one, and thou knowest the commandments.” Said the young man, “All these have I kept from my youth up.” A commandment that can be kept is by necessity a very narrow one; a commandment must always overflow its own letter, if it is really a revelation of the highest morality. The young man measured off the commandments, ten in number, and he said he had kept them, letter by letter, every one, from his youth up. Jesus Christ, closing his eyes that he might see the better, said, “There is

an eleventh commandment ; sell all thou hast and give it unto the poor, and come and follow me ;" and the young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He thought the gate was broad enough surely to admit him and all his wealth-burden ; and Christ said, " You cannot all get through : there is room only for the soul, and not for these poor perishable holdings that are of no use on the other side of the gate." So Jesus did not add to his numbers rashly.

Another man said to him, " Lord, I will follow thee, but—" Christ said, " No, that word *but* must be dropped, there must be no qualifications ; let the dead bury their dead, come thou and follow me." On another occasion he said, " If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross and come after me. Let a man deny himself and follow me. Except a man deny himself he cannot be my disciple." You do not wonder therefore that very few people attached themselves livingly and lovingly to a man whose conditions were so precise and severe. His conditions ought to make us all tremble. Have I denied myself ? Where ? Have I taken up my cross ? What weight is it ? Can men see it ? Do I feel it ? Why, Christianity has been my maker : by the grace of God I am what I am. Christianity, every one of us may say, has made me respectable ; I owe all I have to Christianity : I have been a receiver—what have I given ? I have held out both hands, what have I returned ? Do I not encourage every whim, do I not cultivate every prejudice, do I not give scope to every antipathy, am I not harsh in judgment, uncharitable in feeling, pharisaical in self-sufficiency, scribe-like in my obedience to the mere letter of the law, whilst I neglect its infinite spirit ? Such questions as these I could inflict upon myself until I destroyed every whit of comfort and solace that I now enjoy. There is no cross-bearing in being a Christian of the nominal sort : what cross-bearing there would be in being a Christian of the real sort, who can tell ? If any man will live godly in Jesus Christ he shall suffer persecution.

When I go into trade and arrange all my business, I say I have arranged this business on the principle that I must live. Then it is a false principle, for there is no need for you to live. Did that thought ever strike you ? There is a great need that every man should be honest, but not the slightest necessity in the world that any man, either in the pulpit or out of it, should live an hour. " In making my arrangements and dispositions of energy, and talent, and time, I have always had in full view the fact that I must have subsistence." There is your error : that is the fallacy in your practical logic. What is your subsistence ? Who wants that mechanism of bones you call yourself to stand upright for five minutes longer ? What do you mean by subsistence ? You must have infinite capacity of eating and drinking. Subsistence for how many years ? On what scale ? Do not even the publicans the same—is not that pagan talk—do not the

heathen write such maxims upon their papers and hang them up in their business places as their only Bible? Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but labour for the bread that endureth unto everlasting life.

This is the high gospel of Christ. Who can live it? I cannot, I do not. How then can we classify ourselves? As those who are striving to enter in. Sometimes I have tried for a day or two, but with such ample reservation that it destroyed my action so far as I claimed it to be one of faith. Sometimes I have said, "Now I will try the sea." I have gone down to it, and waited till it was very quiet, and then have touched it with one timid foot, and called that trusting the sea—with a friend holding my hand and my other foot well on shore. I have gone down to touch with reluctance that little foaming wavelet that broke on the golden sand. That is not sea-faring, that is not sea-going—but that is my religion in Christ, too much. I speak of myself, lest I should offend any by unnecessary harshness—for if any man has gone a mile out into the water, thank God for him, and let him go a mile further still. Yet I feel as if going down to the water was moving in the right direction, and perhaps some day—who can tell?—I may boldly throw myself on the great wave and be caught by Christ's hand and led to the better land.

Do not let us give up our striving and our seeking and our persevering—in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not. Try once more, go again—what seest thou? Nothing. Go a third time—what seest thou? Nothing. A fourth time, and a fifth, and a sixth—what seest thou? A cloud about the size of a man's hand. Hasten—that cloud will spread faster than thou canst run, and presently there will be a splash of descending rain, and the earth shall rejoice in the baptism of the divine blessing.

This is the great lesson of striving, and seeking, and trying, and persevering. "Though faint, yet pursuing"—be that thy motto, my poor soul. The discouragements are innumerable, but the promises are many and large. "He giveth more grace." Try again! Let me summon your utmost hopefulness into exercise, for when we fear we go down in the volume and quality of our being. Hope is power. Hope is inspiration. Hope is one of the guarantees of its own fulfilment. The great and loving One is watching you from his bright heaven, nor will he spare his angels, even should twelve legions be needed, to give you victory and rest. My soul, hope thou in God, and wait for him until his brightness drives the gloom for ever away.

XXVII.

HYPOCRISY IN ART — JUDGMENT BY FRUITS — CHRIST'S FORECAST OF HIMSELF.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, truly is our life a great mystery, and there is no answer to it in ourselves, but in thy sweet gospel do we find the whole explanation, yea, we find the infinite light. Thou hast set our life strangely so that we know neither the beginning nor the end of it. Thou dost fix our abode, and thou dost determine our lot upon the earth and we are not our own, we are wholly thine. Thou hast made us so that we can sin against thee with both hands and our whole heart, and thou hast so made our life that it can be turned into one joyous and loving prayer—this is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes. Surely this life of ours is cruel; thou dost afflict us sorely, and by many a deprivation dost thou bring us to poverty extreme. Sometimes thou seemest to have no mercy upon the children of men. Thou dost scourge them to the flowing of the blood, and when they turn up their eyes in faint prayer, the sky is dark and sullen. Behold thou dost separate us one from another, and care not for our Farewell; thou dost dig the grave at the very foot of our pleasure, and in the middle of the feast thou dost blight us with great fears. Yet thou art also full of compassion and loving-kindness: we see it not wholly just now—we see glimpses and sharp glances of thy love, quick lights that flash and flare a moment, and we believe that thou wilt by-and-by explain it all, and show that thou hast done all things well. Thou dost rule us with a rod of iron, and thou dost touch us with a sceptre of love. Thou dost bind us with cords that cannot be broken by human strength and thou dost give us a great liberty that cannot be measured by human imagination. This is our life, a pain, a joy, a night, a day, a thrilling fear, an inspiring hope.

We bring to thee the robe of the week, fouled and torn, that thou mayest again array us in the white linen of the saints. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we come without excuse or defence, for thou hast given us light enough to see all the way, and help enough to sustain us against every assault, yet have we utterly failed and there is no white day in our whole life, without scar or blot upon its beauty. God be merciful unto us sinners, and show us the cross, the sacred cross, the infinite cross, the redeeming, healing, hopeful cross, and in the sight of that vision our sin shall be all forgotten.

Thou dost give us a handful of days, and we go to work to spend it as though it were an eternity—such fools are we and so utterly blind. We do not reckon our little store and set it out in lots, saying, "This shall be done to-day and that to-morrow, if the Lord will, but with a ruffian's force and a prodigal's thoughtlessness we rush upon our little dowry of time and spend it without thy fear. How brief a span is our life: our breath is in our nostrils, our little day is but twelve hours long, and we

know not that we shall live the whole time—so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

We bless thee for all Christian light, for all Christian truth and consolation ; may thy light shine upon our hearts this day, may thy truth make our understandings strong as a great tower, and thy consolation guard our hearts against destructive fears. Save us from the anxiety that is unchristian, from the care that is the result of unbelief, and that becomes an offence against thy dignity and love—enable us to live as those who love the Saviour and trust the loving Father, and in whom death is abolished.

Thou seest us as we are gathered and bent here, praying, suppliant, contrite hearts. Omit no one from thy blessing—let the old man feel young again, let the young be startled into a sobriety that may become religious in the long run, let the busy man remember that he can take nothing out of the world into which he brought nothing, and may those who are in affliction, sorrow, secret distress, and mortal pain, sigh what they cannot speak in words, and tell thee the latent breathings of their heart, what they may not speak in the ear of man. The prodigal is here, with his broken staff and his weary feet, and his head dizzy and aching, and his heart broken and crushed—the Lord give him another chance in life, the Lord show him the way back again and give him courage to take it, every step. Amen.

MATTHEW vii. 15–29.

15. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravelling wolves.

16. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ?

17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit ; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ?

23. And then will I protest unto them, I never knew you : depart from me ye that work iniquity.

24. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ;

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not ; for it was founded upon a rock.

26. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand :

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.

28. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine :

29. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

“BEWARE of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Beware of the false in everything: encourage the instinct and spirit of truth—then you will have no need to be instructed as to particulars and details. Be as true as fire, a perpetual disinfectant, a test that can never be deceived. Have in you, ever dwelling in the temple of your heart, the spirit of truth, then you will know the false man the moment you look at him: the detection of falsehood will not be an act of skill or cleverness, but you will shudder when the false man is within a mile of you, as the wind in some parts of the sea has a sudden chill in it because of the far-off icebergs. Beware of the false in everything, false promises, false directions, false appearances. Then add the word *prophets*, for there is more in the word *false* than there is in the word *prophets*. A man is not a good man simply because he is a prophet: do not trust to the goodness or the nobleness of your office for your personal vindication: you should be bigger than your office—no pulpit on earth should be as grand as you are, no prophet’s robe that ever covered human shoulder should be worth your majesty.

“False prophets.” What ironies there are in speech. To think the word *false* should ever have been married to the word *prophets*. Surely that sacred word *prophet* might have escaped this foul contamination. Let the word *false* go wooing elsewhere, let it marry the market-place, but let it keep a thousand miles away from the snow-like purity of the church of Christ. “False prophets.” Who can imagine two words more positively contradictory? Who can imagine a union so palpably and grossly absurd? Who can effect a junction between two words that shall mean so much that is mischievous, disastrous, ruinous? It requires Jesus Christ surely to say the word *false* before the word *prophets*. Surely that word *false* was written in faint ink, and required his eyes of fire to see it. In other cases it was written large enough: it seemed to boast of its haziness, and to make its very bigness a kind of satirical virtue; but in connection with the word *prophets*, who ever found it before? False professor, false prophet, false teacher, false thinker—it is in that line that lying does its worst mischief.

There is arising amongst us a class of men who are exceedingly anxious not to tell lies in art. It is provocative of secret laughter, and much of it. Solemn persons, who will not allow a painter to tell lies in oil. Yet it is not unbeautiful, and not wholly unsuggestive of things heavenly. Mr. Ruskin would never allow you to paint a piece of wood as if it were oak: such an action would send him half wild. Paint it as black as soot if you like; paint it a glaring, fiery red; steep it in amber—but do not imitate oak. To such an art-critic it is a lie, it is a piece of hypocrisy in art, it is not true, and therefore it ought to be frowned out of your houses. You, skilful amateur, have painted a piece of common slate so skilfully that

your neighbours suppose it to be marble. Your mother insists that it is marble ; or, at all events, that she never could have told the difference between it and marble. Your neighbours almost go the length of applauding you as an artist. If one of the class to which I have referred could come into your house and see that painted slate, veined and shaded like a cutting from the rock, he would call it a lie, and your cleverness would be so much set down to your discredit.

Now, whilst I am not able to say much either for or against these purists in art, I have sometimes wondered if it could be possible for a man who would go into a rage about seeing a piece of common deal painted like oak to tell a lie. The swallowing powers of man are painful mysteries to his Creator. I will tell you what a man can do : he can strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Yet he will not believe in miracles. Who can believe anything with so roomy a throat ? It would seem to swallow up the whole man that he should seem to be nothing but throat. Have you never met in life persons who would almost go into a fit if you were to suggest to them any falsehood in certain directions, who yet could turn right round in pious rage from that suggestion and tell falsehoods of another kind the clock round ?—so curious a creature and irregular and unmanageable is man.

In all ages the false has followed the true. I do not wonder : it is an excellent speculation. In all ages the false has brought the true into trouble. “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. They that are such,” says the apostle, “serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” The nearer the false approaches the true, the more dangerous is it. What do you think they are doing now ? Making stones which they call *simile* diamonds. Take care. People are now making paste so like diamonds as to deceive the unwary. My wonder is that people who are so anxious along that line of life should exhibit anything but the slightest anxiety in matters of doctrine touching correct thinking and the like. Present them with a false diamond as a true one, and let them find out the mistake, and then—you know the rest. But suggest to them a false idea, a crude and self-contradictory philosophy of the universe, any mad theory of creation you like, and they will call it ingenious, skilful—what a young man once called to me “a clever doubt.” Where will be their rage, where their sublime madness, where their fiery and honest indignation ?

The fear is that we become technical purists and moral liars. Your life cannot be good if your teaching is bad. Doctrine lies at the basis of life. There may be those who refine upon doctrine and turn it into useless distinction and vexatious definition, but doctrine, teaching, correct idea, lies at the root and core of our life. You are what you believe. You may

profess to believe a good many things which you do not turn into a lie, but in reality what you believe is the very substance and inspiration of your character. How needful, therefore, that we should be rooted and grounded in it, and saved from perversion and folly, and hold the truth of God with a grip not to be relaxed by the most importunate fingers that try to tear us from our attachment to divine verities.

How are we to know the false from the true? Jesus Christ tells us. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The purist I have been speaking about would be horrified with this kind of preaching; if it were done so by any living man, he would write a paragraph in the newspaper about it; he would say, "The preacher in such and such a church is the most remarkable character for mixed metaphor that probably ever lived. That we may not be apparently speaking to his disadvantage without reason, let us cite the following example." Then in small type would come, "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?" He was talking about a wolf, and now he is talking about grapes and figs and thistles. The teaching of the great teacher, whoever he is, is full of ellipses. He thinks more rapidly than he can speak: words cannot keep pace with his intellectual velocity. This is pre-eminently the case with all the teaching of the New Testament. The lacunæ, or gaps, and breaks, are innumerable, and only the man who wants to find the truth can find it amid many of the statements which are of the figurative or metaphorical kind. If you really want to know what Christ means in this case, do not trouble yourselves with the rapidity with which he changes the metaphor; but, with an honest and sober heart, look at the case, when he says, "By their results shall ye know them." So then a false teacher may require a little time for self-revelation. The nearer he approaches the truth the longer time may he require fully to disclose his doctrine and his purpose. The hand may be the hand of Esau, the voice may be the voice of Jacob: it is difficult for the false hand to get a false voice, and for the false voice to get a false hand: nature is set against such conjunctions, and will not afford facilities for the completion of lies.

Jesus Christ submitted to his own test. His words are, "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of these works do you stone me?" And, again, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe me not, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him." Judge all preaching by its results, judge all doctrine by its effects. My young friend, let me speak soberly and with great breadth of persuasiveness and sympathy to you upon this subject. The doctrine to which you have been listening recently in various places seems to you to be brilliant

—you are enamoured, you are under a spell, you say the doctrine seems to refute all other doctrine, and to be bright with new hopes. You are now in the intellectual period. How does the doctrine come down into life? What does it make of its believer?—is it a painted cloud to be gazed at and wondered about like an apocalypse in the air, or is it an inspiration that expresses itself in charity, love, patience, forbearance, sympathy, and that compels to honourableness of conduct? My first question about any doctrine is—How does it come down-stairs out of its dreamer's intellect and behave itself in the kitchen?—how does it put on its apron and tuck up its sleeves and go to life's daily work?—how does it go into the chamber and hush itself into gentleness and quietness, and what does it say to the pained heart, and what to the ebbing life? By its fruits let it be known: What it can do in the plain, every-day circles of life shall be its proofs to me of its heavenly origin. It requires God to make himself of no reputation, and do earth's lowest, humblest work. I ask you not, therefore, how much your doctrine titillates your intellect, inflames and pleases your fancy; I ask you how it comes down to the counter and pays its bills?—how it stands by a man when all hell seems to be against him in huge and terrible assault on his integrity and his peace? The rainbow is to me most beautiful, but I cannot live upon it.

Now we come to a remarkable passage, in which the tone of the great Preacher changes with some suddenness—the twenty-first verse to the twenty-third inclusive. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” That is a new tone in the sermon—Lord, Lord. Why, whoever thought of saying, “Lord, Lord,” to the carpenter's son? Inflamed by the passion of his own rhetoric he has started up into lordship. We never thought of calling thee Lord, poor Peasant. It is a matter of consideration amongst some of us why certain men should be called “Mr.” at all. Think of that, that we solid-headed Englishmen make a matter of enquiry as to whether certain persons should be called “Mr.” And then a very acute subject, rising into a kind of social agony, is as to whether certain persons can properly be called “Esquire.” These are the mighty problems that tear and vex our nineteenth century utterly now and then. Here is a man who began life in a manger, and whose parents absconded suddenly into Egypt and wandered about homelessly for some time, who says that at a certain time people will be calling him “Lord, Lord,” and he will not know them. It is in these subtle touches that I find the true quality of my Teacher's character.

“Many will say to me in that day.” What, and is he to be Judge as well as Lord? Is he to be the Arbitrator as well as the Teacher? What a forecast, what an assumption, how high the ground on which he stands. If it be not a rock, he will fall off, and we shall hear no more of him.

“But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Is he not *our* Father which is in heaven? Yes, mediately, not immediately. Through a priestly intercession, not by right of filial obedience and uncorrupted and incorruptible love.

“Many will say unto me, Have we not prophesied in thy name?” There he feels the throbbing of his own almightiness: he feels already that his name is to be a charm in the world: thus early he forecasts the marvels that will be wrought in his name. Men will wear it as an amulet, speak of it as a charm, offer it as a certificate, wear it as a seal and an endorsement. This he said, not after ten centuries’ experience, but at the very beginning of the beginning. How true it is let time testify.

“Then will I say unto them, Depart from me.” What, then, does he make heaven, and does he make hell; and is everything to be determined by his will, and have we all to be subjected to his criticism and to undergo his judgment? All this is most fully involved in the statement we are now perusing.

Now I see what it meant when he went up into a mountain. He speaks as if he were on a mountain. I wondered why he withdrew to that height: he explains it in the conclusion of his sermon. Why the sermon itself is a mountain, in shape, in bulk, in dignity; beginning with the gentle slopes of the beatitudes, easy, vernal slopes, green with spring’s own loveliness, he passes on to rugged places, modified Sinais, stony, rough, rugged places that would affright us but for the light of his smile which falls upon them—and on he goes, higher and higher in his doctrine, he rises to high challenges and new proclamations, and now the sermon culminates in lordships and supremacies which overlook and dominate the whole earth. We saw him by the quiet river, we watched him driven into the bleak wilderness, we saw him walking by the seaside; now we behold him seated upon a mountain—a culmination in very deed, an upgathering of all that went before, and a place whence he projected himself across the whole abyss of time. Henceforward Jesus takes the name of Lord; henceforward “these sayings of mine” are to be the root and core of the only durable philosophy, and henceforward men are wise or foolish according as they build or build not on Christ.

Now we see why he chose the mountain; no other pulpit would have been worthy of such a discourse, no scaffold of man’s making could have borne that infinite weight, no platform of human erection could have supplied base enough for the projection of such teaching. Great husbandman, on the top of the mountain, thou dost scatter a handful of corn; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon and the cities of the plain shall rejoice in its abundance.

XXVIII.

THE OMISSIONS OF THE SERMON—CHRIST'S ADAPTATION TO HIS AUDIENCE—CAUTION AGAINST MERE LITERALISM—COMMON TRIALS.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, for every gentle promise of thine our hearts would bless thee. We need thy tenderest word, for the wounds in our life are vital, and there is no recovery for the soul of man but by the healing which thou dost supply. We are wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, and there is no health in us : we have destroyed ourselves, but in thee is our help. This we say to ourselves when we are most sober-minded, and see most clearly into our real condition in the sight of heaven. Sometimes we delude ourselves, and by many a pretence do we seek to mislead divine judgment : we wash our hands with soap and nitre, and we think that therefore our heart must be clean : we robe ourselves in white linen as if we clothed the spirit with the snow of absolute holiness, but now and again we see into our own corruption and it frightens us with a great terror, for in us there is no health—we are charnel houses, we are dead souls, we are corrupt and pestilent in thy sight, and we annoy heaven by our very breathing.

To whom shall we come but unto the living one for life, and to the eternal for the extension of our duration? We hasten to the cross, we flee with feet of lightning to thy side, thou wounded One, Emmanuel, the God-Man. Thou didst never cast out the contrite seeker, thou didst never say "No" to the broken heart; when streaming eyes have been turned to thee thou hast poured upon them the light of thy smile, and made even the tears of sorrow beautiful. We all come to thee with great piercing cries of want, sharp and ringing utterances of agony, principally saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and we wait with one grand expectation for thine infinite answer of pardon and peace through the blood of the Lamb. Amen.

MATTHEW vii. 24-29.

24. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock :

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock.

26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand :

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.

28. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine :

29. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

WE have, as you are aware, gone verse by verse through all the preceding chapters in the gospel by Matthew. We began with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," and from time to time we have pursued a consecutive study of the gospel by Matthew, and we have now come to the close of the Sermon upon the Mount. My object to-night is to review the Sermon upon the Mount as a whole, having already perused it sentence by sentence and commented thereupon.

It is a very common question which men ask of one another, "What did you think of the sermon to-day?" It is that question which I intend to answer, the sermon being the Sermon upon the Mount and the Preacher being the Son of God.

Looking at the sermon as a whole, I will take it for granted that you ask me what I, having heard the sermon, thought of it. Let me tell you first of all, how much I was struck with the omissions of the sermon. I am told that a sermon is right in proportion as it begins with the creation of man and steadily pursues its heavy way through all human history, and sums itself up by the events of the day of judgment. If that is a correct interpretation of a sound and good sermon, then the sermon delivered upon the mount must be regarded as being most remarkable for its serious omissions. I am not aware that the Preacher has ever referred to the existence of Adam. To the best of my recollection, there is not one solitary word in the sermon about what took place in Eden, and the terms "original sin" are not to be found in the discourse from beginning to end. Nowhere did the Preacher say, to the best of my recollection, "You are wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, and there is no health in you;" never once did he say, "All ye like sheep have gone astray, ye have turned everyone to his own way;" in no instance did he say, "There is none righteous, no, not one; God looked down from heaven to see the children of men, and behold if there were any that did good, and lo there was none that served him with a perfect heart." How then?

In the next place I am struck by the utter absence of what we call now-a-days Evangelical Doctrine. There is nothing here about the Blood of Christ, there is nothing here about the Cross of Calvary, there is nothing here about believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, as that word is evangelically interpreted and applied. There is here nothing of the doctrine of grace, nothing of the doctrine of justification by faith, nothing of the grand savoury doctrine of the assurance of adoption into the family of God. The Preacher himself calls his discourse a set of Sayings. Where is orthodoxy? where is grace? where is faith? where is election? where is assurance? where is a single element that is denoted amongst us to-day as evangelical? where is unction? So far, I think, I could justify myself in every sentence I have uttered by the letter that is

now spread open before me in the sacred volume. And yet it would be only a justification in the letter, for every one of the grand doctrines I have now referred to, though not specifically named in the discourse, is absolutely and profoundly assumed as the basis of the entire utterance. So mistaken may we be when we hear preachers : we bind them too severely to the mere letter : if we do not hear our favourite set of terms and tones exactly as we have always heard them, the temptation is to feel and to suggest that the preacher is not preaching the grand old doctrine by which we obtained our personal salvation.

Now the reality of the case is that this Sermon upon the Mount could not have been preached if man had not fallen from his first estate. The language would have been an unknown tongue, the doctrine would have been without application and point to any living creature. Jesus Christ takes human history as he finds it : he addresses the human nature that was before him, and I ask you to lay your finger upon a single point in his discourse that would have been appropriate if there had not taken place, some time in human history, a total collapse of human integrity. We must allow our preachers therefore some latitude of expression, we must allow that some things are to be taken for granted ; we really must not insist on having in every discourse a correct and formal statement of all our theological beliefs and doctrines ; we must seize human history as it actually is, we must modernise some antique expressions, and must mint again some grand old words and turn them into the coinage and the currency of our present phraseology. Be careful how you take away the reputation or character of any man for not being evangelical. Such persons as I now refer to might have taken away the reputation of the Son of God himself by confining their attention strictly to the narrow letter. Rely upon it that the evangelical doctrine is to be found sometimes under apparently uncouth forms of expression. Now and again the rocks of our thinking may be reddened with unseen blood, the blood of Jesus Christ himself, whilst we who only see imperfectly what is taking place, may blame the preacher for want of evangelical grace and unction and pathos.

Suppose a man should say to a student, "In order to be a sea captain, you must be able to take the latitude and the longitude of a ship at sea. That is one thing which you must be able to do." What would you think of that young student turning round and saying to his father, "This teacher ignores great fundamental truths : he never said a word to me about the first four rules in arithmetic—do you call that orthodox direction and calculation ? He uses long, fine words ; he says I must be able to take the latitude and the longitude of a ship at sea—is that fundamental teaching ? The man ignores the very root and base of arithmetical reckoning." How would you esteem such a criticism ? Surely as a piece of blatant folly : for how can any man take the latitude and longitude of a ship at

sea if he is ignorant of the first four rules of arithmetic? To be able to do it assumes all previous knowledge and training. The teacher states results rather than processes, and this form of teaching must sometimes be allowed to the pulpit. Jesus Christ speaks to human nature as he finds it; he takes the human history for granted, and he lets his gracious words fall upon the hearing of mankind to be received, adopted, and applied according to the personal conditions and requirements.

If you ask me again what I thought of the Sermon on the Mount when I heard it, I should say how much struck I was by the infinite wisdom and tact of the preacher, in beginning just where his audience was prepared to begin. Instead of coming with some high-flown morality, of which the world had never heard before, he said, "What are your maxims? How far have you gone in the Book already?" And when they said to him, "We have come up to this point, namely, Thou shalt not kill," he said in effect, "Very well; so far so good. But that is a rough and vulgar morality that hardly begins to be morality at all: it is a very little way beyond the merest barbarism. It is a little from it, and so far it is upon a right line—but I say unto you, Ye shall not be angry with your brother without a cause. How far have you got upon the line of civilisation?" The answer is, "Thus far, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." Jesus Christ says, "You must alter your doctrine upon the latter point: I say unto you, Love your enemies."

Still the point to be noted is this, that Jesus Christ took morality as he found it, began where the people were prepared to begin. He took upon him the form of a servant and became such to their ignorance: he made himself of no reputation—instead of taking in a high-flown language which the people could not understand, he took their germs and elements of morality und civilisation, and carried them onward to their proper development and culmination.

This is the right method of teaching, this is the philosopher's plan. If I want to teach a child, I must ask the child where he can begin—I must not play the great scholar with my little pupil, I must lay aside my intellectual divinity, and be born in the child's place. I must make myself of no reputation, and find little words for my little hearer, and begin the race where his little feet can begin to run. The child looks at his alphabet, and his face, his eyes, his mouth, round into a great wonder, not unmarked by a peculiar trace of distress, for he thinks it impossible that he can ever make friends with such monstrous looking figures. What had I to do? To sympathise with his distress, to tell him that once upon a time I was quite frightened, and that little by little I got to know them, and that now we are the best friends in the world. Then I say to my little hearer, "You have not got to tackle the whole six-and-twenty at once, you have got to take them one by one. Now we will drop the other five-and-twenty and

see what we can do with the first one." Is that the man I have heard talk in polysyllables and in long and well-connected sentences, and who has endeavoured to work his way up into high climax and ringing appeal in the hearing of the great congregation? Yet he is talking so to that little child—why? Simply because he is a little child. If I were to talk so to a man, I would talk below the occasion, I would not rise to the height of my responsibility. Jesus Christ therefore says in effect, "Where can you begin? You begin at, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt hate thine enemy, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—now hear me." And then he proceeds to unwind and disclose the superior revelation, and to lead his disciples onward, little by little, from height to height, until they are all on the mountain with him together, a happy, thankful, well-instructed band.

And yet there are dangers about that method of teaching. It is God's method in the Bible, and he has gotten himself well affronted for it; every pigmy who could double up his fist has smitten God in the face for adopting that kind of teaching. Persons have written books in contravention of Mosaic history, Mosaic science, Mosaic archæology, geology, and many other ologies with awkward names. Well, now, how does all this intellectual opposition arise? Here are men with sharp eyes and pointed fingers gathered around the first chapter of the book of Genesis, and they are saying, "How can this be?" not knowing that God spake to men as children, and as they were able to hear it. He, in effect, said, what Christ said upon the mount, "How far have ye come?" Men talked about the sun rising and the sun setting—it seemed as if it did. A man said, "I saw the sun in the East, and I watched and waited, and I saw him sink in the West; so the sun rises and the sun sets." And the Lord said, "So be it; that is your conception of the astronomy of the universe; then let us begin there and say the sun rises and the sun sets, and let us talk as if that were really so."

And again they say, "How can all this take place in a day?" The Lord spoke to those to whom he was speaking in the only language they could understand. What is a day? Twelve hours? Nothing of the kind. Four-and-twenty hours? Nothing of the sort. That is only one kind of day. *Day* is a long word, a broad word, a strange word, spreading itself out over great spaces. Why, you say, "Every dog has its day;" you say, "I must preach to the day"—what mean ye? That I must preach to every twelve hours the clock ticks off? You know that you have no such meaning, and yet now that God gave us these infantile lessons because we were in an infantile state of mind, we go up to him and say, "What did you mean by talking to us about the sun rising and the sun setting, when the sun never does anything of the sort? And what did you mean by saying this and that were done in one day when there are only four-and-twenty hours in the day, and part of that must be spent in sleeping?"

Why it is just like this : you gave your little boy at four or five years of age a rocking-horse, and when he is four-and-twenty he comes to you and says, "What did you mean by so insulting me—giving me a rocking-horse—what did you mean by giving a man a thing like that, a dead piece of wood, a painted horse—what did you mean by giving a man such a gift?" Suppose you had such an idiot son, what would you say to him? You would say, "My boy, it was not given to the man, it was given to the child ; it was not given to five-and-twenty years of age, it was given to a five-year-old infant : it was not intended that you should always be on the rocking-horse, it was a hint, a suggestion, something to be going on with—the only thing you could then use. It was adapted to the then state of your mind, and all this abuse you are now pouring upon me is utterly undeserved and beside the mark."

So there are persons who still reckon the Bible in its letter only ; they have not seen into the inner meaning, their religious imagination has never been inflamed, they know nothing of the holy passion, the secret heart-unction which breaks a loaf into a feast for thousands, and which finds in one cup of water wine enough for a life's long drinking. O, my friend, thou art a personal letter, locked up in the little gaol of some literal verse. I heard of a person the other day who thinks that she ought not to pray unless her head is covered. To think of the eternal Father of us all looking down to see if you, dear old mother or young sister, have got your head covered before you say, "Our Father which art in heaven." So, to meet the circumstances of the case, not always having an umbrella at her disposal, she puts a pocket-handkerchief on her head in order to accommodate the infinite Jehovah. Would you believe that such idiocy were possible in the nineteenth century?

This is the difficulty of the preacher : he cannot get his hearer or student away from the letter. The student will not sow the seed of the letter and let it grow into the fruit of the spirit. "No, no," says he, "I have got this seed : I am not going to part with it ;" and he is thought to be very tenacious of the truth, he is reported to be exceedingly attached to the old truth. The man who takes his handful of corn called the biblical letter and sows it in his consciousness, sows it in his imagination, sows it in his heart, sows it in every part of his nature, and lets it grow in the sunshiny blessing and the dewy baptism of heaven until it blooms into verdure and blossom and beauty and culminates in fruitfulness, is the man who uses the Bible in the right way. It was so the Son of God used it : he met us where we could be met, he took us by the hand as little children, and he left us under the ministry of God the Holy Ghost to grow in grace, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, to grow in that subtle, loving sympathy which sees God and touches him and holds him with a heart grip for which there are no words. Hast thou attained that

height in the divine life? Then truly art thou born again, and truly are thine ears circumcised to hear the inner music of the celestial world.

You have asked me what I thought of the sermon as a whole: now I should like to know what Jesus Christ himself thought of it. The preacher has an estimate or an opinion of every sermon which he is permitted to proclaim. I cannot but wonder therefore what Christ's own opinion of his discourse was, and happily we have a reply to that inquiry. He treated his sayings as fundamental; he said, in effect, "These are foundation stones, these are not fine things to put on the top of the capital, these are great rough, unhewn rocks to build on." We like polish in our modern preachers; in fact we have gone so far as to say of certain preachers, that they are extremely finished—which is awfully true. Jesus Christ laid foundations: he himself is revealed to us as a rock, and we may say of those who do not follow us, "Their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges. He is a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, elect, tested by every means at the divine disposal." That is the kind of preacher we ought to hear every now and then, and though we do, now and again, hear a man who is in every sense of the term most finished, we should again and again for our soul's bettering and rousing hear a kind of preacher that is fundamental, that brings us back to the rock, that puts a test into the base we are building upon, and that says, "Either this is rock or this is mud—sand. Beware."

He also regarded his sayings as supplying an indestructible basis of life. The rain descended, and the winds blew, and beat upon the rock-founded house, and it fell not. Like foundation, like building; Jesus Christ thus gave his hearers assurance of durability, strength, protection, indestructibility, immortality. I cannot see the foundation of this building: it looks well as an edifice, its proportions, its decorations, its defences are excellent, so far as my eye can judge, but what the foundation is I cannot tell. So it is with many a human life. Many a man talks to me of whom I form an excellent opinion. He looks well, he speaks well, his appearance is all that can be desired, but what his foundation is I do not know. Do not be content with appearances, do not be satisfied with mere external decoration. If you are going to build me a house, I say, "Be sure first of all about the foundation: never mind about the decoration, let me know that the house is well founded, do not tell me that the drawing-room is well papered. Mere decoration I can take in hand little by little, as I may be disposed to expend money upon it, but the foundation once laid, who can get at it again?"

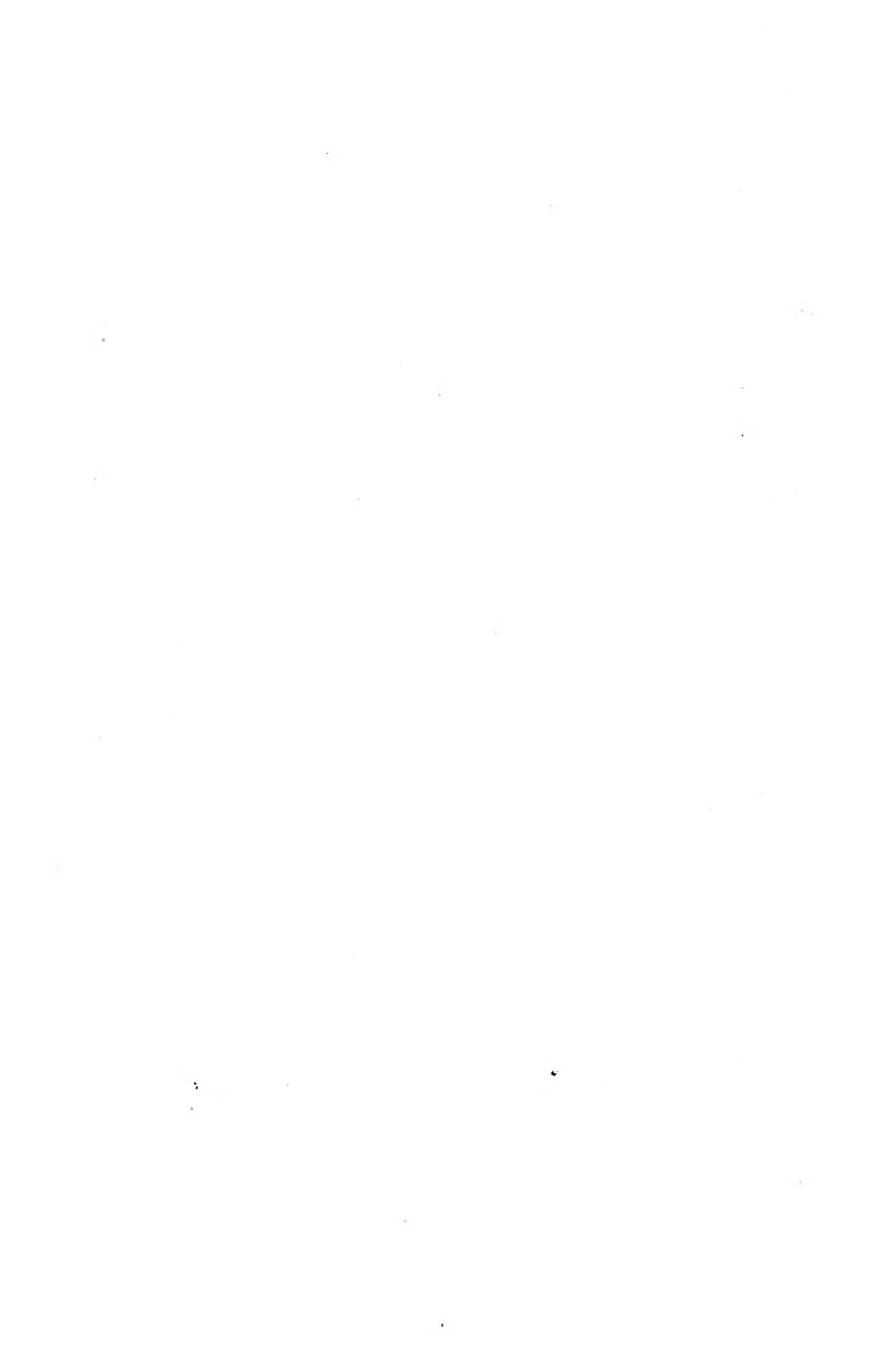
Both the houses had trial. The rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon both houses. So I have heard men say, "Well, it seems to me as if you Christian people had quite as many trials as other folks." So they have. I have heard you say, "It seems to

me as if being religious did not save you from trouble, for really you seem to have just as much to contend with as I have, and I make no profession of religion." So it is. What is the result? Everything depends upon the foundation: if your foundation is not right, I do not care how high your building is, or how it is decorated, or how put together. I do not care if it is pinnacled all over with gold, all but piercing the clouds—it will come down, and great will be the fall of it. I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree, yet he passed away, and lo, he was not, yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.

What is your foundation? Are you resting upon the eternal Son of God—are you resting upon Christ? You shall be saved, for the foundation is safe. Your house is a very odd one, my friend; I never look at it with any pleasure; you are peculiar, crotchety, odd-minded, eccentric, extremely impracticable, and very few people care to visit you or sympathise with you—but you shall be saved, for the foundation is elect, precious, tried, laid in Zion by hands divine.

On the contrary, here is a man that I like very much; I like his look, I like his voice, I like his reading, I go with all his aspirations and sympathies of a social, civilising, and literary and elevating kind. So far as this world is concerned, he is a beautiful and noble soul to all outward seeming, but he has no foundation except a foundation of sand. Then your rejoicing is but for a time: so long as health continues and business is prosperous and all around you is sunny, men will praise you and believe in you—but there is a trying time coming. I know it will come upon you: you are broad-chested, heavy-boned, full-blooded, nobly built from a physical point of view, and it would seem as if death could never strike such a target. But he will—that great thunder voice shall be contracted into a whining whisper, that great strong frame shall be bent down like a broken bulrush, the time will come when you will be thankful for the most menial service which your most menial servant can render you. The time will come when the window that used to be a blaze of light will be darkened and there will be a shadow upon it, grim as a skeleton. Then the quality of the man will be discovered: in that hour it were well to know the Son of God, the sweet Jesus, the infinite Saviour, the bleeding Lamb.

Let us all endeavour to read this Sermon on the Mount over and over again, and to make it our life-chart, and to do nothing that will not stand the test of its divine fire.



CHRIST AS A PREACHER.

I.

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE AS A PREACHER.

THE PREACHER LIKE NO OTHER MAN—OUR CIVILISATION AN INHERITANCE—SOME BADLY-USED WORDS—THE HELPFUL PREACHER.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to thee through Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, for he alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and there is none other : he is sent of God to bring us unto the Father, and no man cometh unto Christ except the Father draw him. Herein are wonderful mysteries, which we cannot penetrate, but where we cannot understand we fall down and adore. What are we that we should know aught? We are of yesterday and know nothing : our breath is in our nostrils, and whilst we talk of life behold we are thrown down and are dead men. It well becometh us, therefore, to hold our peace in thy house, and to listen attentively, with the whole hearing of our heart, lest we miss any tone of thy gracious and living voice. Jesus Christ our Saviour loved us : he gave himself for us ; his head, his hands, his heart, his feet, his side, bled for us : it was holy blood—the blood of atonement.

Thou art always careful of us, as if we were worth much in thy sight. We cannot understand thy care. We could understand thy crushing us because of the provocation of our sins, but why thou shouldst save us and spare us and love us and mightily redeem us with blood, every day in the year, lo, this is a mystery of love which baffles our mind. Deep is thy design, gracious is thy purpose, immeasurable is thine intent, unknown in its beginning and uncomprehended in its issues—it is enough for us to know that thou doest all things in wisdom and in love. To-day is the battle, and to-morrow the mystery, and on the third day dost thou perfect the issue. Help us to fight, to wait, to worship, to suffer, to endure with noble courage and un murmuring patience, knowing that the end will come as a great surprise of hidden love, a revelation of infinite tenderness.

We bless thee for thy word ; it is good reading in sandy places, and in wildernesses full of stones and wild beasts : it makes the very wind, when loudest and coldest, music in our hearing. It shows us where the tree is, the branches of which will sweeten the bitter pool ; it is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Help us to understand it by our modesty, humility, self-renunciation, utter, child-like, unquestioning trust. Thou dost speak wonderful things to the child-heart—may ours evermore be such. Save us from our own imaginings, deliver us from the temptations of our own sagacity and learning, and help us in all simpleness, with complete trust and love of heart, and with the openness of soul which receives all heaven's gifts, to wait upon the Lord, yea, to wait patiently for him.

Every heart has its own story—of joy, of sorrow, of baffled hope, of dead ambitions, of frustrated purposes and trusts—send a gospel to each soul, that none may feel itself left out on the day of benediction and rest. Speak comfortably unto Jerusalem :

send thine angel to cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, yea, let this be the day of jubilee, when silver trumpets shall announce the glad reprieve, the great and universal amnesty and release. Give us a nail in thy sanctuary, give us a standing on the threshold of thy house, bring us quite within the sacred enclosure of the holy temple, and give us rest and peace within its hallowed defences. Amen.

TEXT: "His doctrine."—MATTHEW vii. 28.

IN what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ's preaching was shown to be profoundly doctrinal. There is many a figure here and there—the figures being points of gold that glitter in the infinite mass of rock, the rock being the doctrine which is expounded with so marvellous and astounding an authority. Yet there is hardly any hint of the parable of which Jesus Christ was to make such copious use in his after-ministry, until we come, indeed, to the closing sentences, and there, in the image of the two builders and the two foundations, we have a hint of the more vivid and popular method of teaching which was coming. In this sermon Jesus Christ was profoundly and vitally doctrinal. In his opening discourse he was pre-eminently the WORD. Hence the deep thinking, the benedictions that seem to come up from eternity, and the whole doctrine of the individual inspiration of character, until we reach the very holiness and perfection of God. This is, indeed, the very mystery of the Logos, the Word, the ineffable and infinite thought. This is the divine meaning, incarnated in plain human words. In this discourse we are quite out of the region of finite speculation; here are no happy guesses, no striking suggestions which startle the speaker quite as much as they startle the hearer. We have here the deep things of God, spoken with an unction which makes the very hearing of them the most solemn responsibility we ever incurred. To have heard some sermons is to have laid up wrath against the day of wrath, or to have added to the joy of the day of supreme gladness. It were better for us that we had not heard some sermons—our life was never the same after the hearing.

Now the servant must herein be as the Master, according to the measure and degree of his capacity. His speech must be, above all things, religious. Not religious because of surrounding circumstances, as, for example, the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the pulpit—but in itself, its origin, its tone, its meaning, it must be profoundly religious, it must be from above. It must not be literary, clever, piquant, or anything else that is of the quality and limitation of art. It must come with all the sacredness of a divine origin, bringing with it the living air of the upper world, and bearing the thought of the hearer upward to the holy elevation and sympathy which come of the presence of God. The danger is, and the people make that danger greater every day, that preaching be mere literature, made peculiar by a religious accent. The danger is that preaching becomes one of many things all

standing upon a level, and if it should become so, the hearer will be to blame quite as much as the speaker. The preacher must be like no other man. Every other speaker you may be able to measure and estimate; you know where he begins and where he ends, and you can weigh out his merit in scales, and announce his stature in inches; but the preacher must be a weird man, without beginning of days, without father or mother, a secret, a mystery, a voice, a flash of light, a revelation, a burning bush, and the great question must always be: Whence hath he this? It is not in the lockers of the rich man, it is not in the treasures of the literary student—Whence this wisdom? And the answer must be, God-begotten, Heaven-born, its roots deep in the rock and its pinnacles flashing beyond the stars!

If preaching can be traced back to a school, a teacher, a custom, it is shallow and barren. It must come from eternity, from the invisible God, being at once so simple as to excite the interest and curiosity of little children and so profound as to abash the wise. The first thing, therefore, the preacher has to do is to renounce himself. He must not limit himself to his own little power of invention and expression; he must not dig wells in the sand of his own cleverness, or they who drink thereof will thirst again. He is a messenger: he must deliver God's message. If he do not deliver God's message, blame the hearer. The congregation creates the pulpit. The earnest hearer comes to hear God's word, but how many earnest hearers are there in any assembly? If I had one man here, and he wanted to hear God's word, I dare not speak my own. But I have a thousand men here who want to hear my word and not God's. If a soul were here affrighted by its own sin, asking me, with eye and voice and trembling fame, to reveal the Gospel, I dare not keep back any part of it. But you are not here for that purpose—I speak of the multitude, not of the individual here and there whose object it may be, indeed is, to hear what God the Lord will say.

But if a sermon be charged with God's messages, will it be dull and heavy? Look at the Sermon on the Mount for answer. What variety, what penetration, what liveliness, what startling application and appeal! How restful the benedictions, quieting the soul, soothing all fear, encouraging all goodness, and watering the very roots of life from the river of God! Now the great Teacher must be figurative. He has not begun the great parabolical fancy and use yet. Still I see the beginnings of it in that very initial discourse. He cannot be dull. He says, Ye are the light of the world, ye are the salt of the earth, ye are a city set on a hill." Then he tells about the candle and the candlestick, and the bushel, and then he tells about the beam in one man's eye and the mote in another's, and then he winds up with the two hearers, the two foundations, the two houses, and the two destinies. A wonderful sermon, and yet so doctrinal. It is not dry

doctrine, but doctrine vitalised, illumined, glittering all over with diamonds of the first water. How solemn the lessons to the lustful, the angry heart, the violent tongue, the anxious spirit ; what a review of the past, what an outlook upon the future ? Verily this is not a sermon in our sense of the term. You might describe it by great figures, call it the very Ganges of truth, illustration, philosophy, moral teaching, and appeal ; call it a sky which seems to have been built to cover our little world, and yet which encloses within itself unnumbered millions of planets.

Was the sermon, then, dull and heavy ? It was an infinite beginning. That is the marked peculiarity of Christ's preaching ; it never ended. Persons sometimes said, "What, is he done ?" What did that curious question arise from ? Not from the abruptness of the speaker, but from the infinitude and immeasurableness of his message. Others can round off their discourses : from the pipe of their wit they can mould and sphere the soap-bubbles of their cleverness, and let them float on the air—done ! But the speaker of infinite secrets and infinite gospels, conclude as he may, can never be done. There may be a comma, a semi-colon, and even a colon, in this high mystic literature, but the period is never wanted, for the conclusion is never accomplished.

Yes, this sermon on the mount is emphatically the WORD—the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, the Word showing itself in our mean syllables, illuminating but not consuming them. It took all that time to get the speech of the world ready to receive the gospel, even in the degree in which it was preached in the Sermon on the Mount. You cannot tell how much time is required, or would be required, if you yourself had everything to do in order to enable you to accomplish the simplest act in civilisation. O, ingrates are we, and most thoughtless inheritors of inheritances all but infinite ! If you had to do everything for yourself in the simplest act of civilisation, it would be seventy years before you could dine. It would be a hundred years and more before you could travel from one capital to another. But to-day we take all these things as a right. We grumble at the roads, of course ; poor fool, dost thou know it, that if thou hadst to make a road it would take thee twenty years to get from here to thy mother's house ? It took a thousand years to get human speech ready to take in the gospel and utter it in poor broken syllables. For God's difficulty is our language. He cannot tell us what he means because the dewdrop is not big enough to hold the sun. So we have suggestion and hint and flash of light and sudden large glimpse, as we suppose it to be, of things divine. But our human speech is an inn too small for the birth of God into our human imagination and individual grasp of thought.

Jesus Christ had something distinct and definite to say to mankind. He was not one teacher amongst many. How often shall I insist that the

preacher is not one amongst many, yet the foolish virgins and more foolish men will compare the preacher with the lecturer. The preacher has nothing to say to you; the lecturer lives on his own vitals, spins his own cleverness, and works marvellous jugglery with his own ability, and eloquence, and wit, and fancy, and fun. It is beautiful, and instructive, and useful. But the preacher plucks no word from his own tree. What am I—a lecturer? A man with so many yards of foolscap on which he writes beautiful sentences and telling stories? Have I fallen to that? The minister is an errand-bearer; he has to tell what he has been told. Do not find fault with him; you want to hear something else; he has nothing else to tell. How I could please you sometimes if I were in tolerably good health, if you would allow me to talk my own nonsense; it would be easy to gratify you then. I would weave coloured clouds around you, and call those coloured clouds sermons. I would salute your ears with witty stories, I would mock you with intellectual taunt, and I would speak severe things to the man *in the next pew*, and you would be so delighted! But I dare not put in a single word of my own without initialing it. Ah, me! if the manuscript is initialed all over, it is not God's sermon, but mine. Paul once or twice ventured to say something, and he always initialed it, put a large and most legible P under it—said, "I speak this of myself." He need not have said so. We knew it to be so at once; the discrepancy was infinite. Still, conscientious man as he was, he put down a very large P against his own suggestions, and it was as well he did so, for they are most impracticable.

When Christ's sermon was done the criticism passed upon it was, "Not as the scribes." That is the criticism with which every sermon should be listened to, not as the speculatists, not as the guessers, not as the lecturers, not as the inquirers, not as the gropers—but with authority, with all the momentum of an eternal and infinite impulse. How can a finite creature give such an impulse? He cannot: this is the gift of God, and always goes along with the word of God. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Search the Scriptures. Preach the preaching that I bid thee, and let the hearers come to hear God's word and they will assuredly receive it.

The Sermon on the Mount is emphatically what is termed a dogmatic discourse, that is to say, it was positive, definite, practical, final. It was not a paper read before a religious debating society, for the purpose of eliciting opinions—that is the idea of a modern sermon, and therefore we say when we get away from church, "Aye, aye, it is all very well, you know, for him to be standing up there and having it all his own way." Indeed! If he has it all his own way he is an unfaithful servant. A sermon is not a paper read before a number of equals for the purpose of the reader's saying afterwards, "Now, my fellows, men of equal understanding will you be kind enough to tell me what you think of all this?" If it

admits of an appeal of that kind, it is not a sermon, it is a lecture out of the lecturer's own brain. If it is the word of God, pure, simple, unadulterated, absolute, that is to say, if it is quoted from the Book which we, by the very fact of our assembling here, accept as God's Book, then the preacher has it *not* all his own way; he is an errand-bearer, he is a deliverer of holy messages, and the messages are not to be measured by his personality, but by the degree in which they can be substantiated from the volume which he is set up to open and expound.

I do not wonder at this word *dogmatic* falling into a bad reputation. I do not like the word myself. In itself it is an innocent word. Turn it into Greek, turn it into Latin, beat it into English, it is still an honest, a pure word, in itself; but it has been made such bad use of that I do not wonder that people should avoid it. I do not suppose that you would be very fond of using a rope in which somebody has been hung. This word *dogmatic* is therefore a word which has in some relations a bad or an unwelcome meaning. So is the word *casuistry* a very innocent word in itself, and expressive of a very proper intellectual process, but it has been so badly used that I have begun to distrust and disown it. So is the word *catholic* a simple and beautiful word, but it has been tied up in such wrong relations that, like a rope which has hanged somebody, we feel as if it might hang us too if we did not take care of it. So have words been debased, prostituted, defiled, so that I do not wonder at many persons looking askance upon those words and avoiding dogmatic teaching, casuistical reasoning, and catholic divinity.

Looking upon this Sermon on the Mount as a model for preachers through all time, it justifies the preacher in laying down a definite doctrine. The preacher does not invite his hearers to talk over something with a view to a settlement. That of course would be very comfortable if we could meet here and lay our arms upon a table and say, "Now what do you think about it?" Well, it would be chatty, and nice, and sort of friendly, and almost convivial it might become. We do not assemble to *make* a Bible, but to read one. We are HEARERS: let that word be emphatic. Observe its limit, its meaning; we are hearers, we do not speak, we listen. We say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." How far from this our congregational discipline! The very first word you would have said this morning, if I had not made this remark, would have been, the moment you got outside, "How did you like him this morning, eh?" How did you like him—poor hireling performer, poor miserable clerk of all work—how did you like him? What about the substance, the doctrine, the call, the appeal, the tears, the unction, the consequences? Ask how you like the electric light as compared with the poor half-drunken gas flame, but do not ask how you like the infinite, the complete, the divine, the eternal. Hear it—listen—the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the

earth keep silence before him. To be a good hearer is to be a good learner. Hearing is an art of the soul, an accomplishment of the heart. Sir Isaac Newton said the only difference he knew between himself and others was that he seemed to be able to pay more attention than some of them. The power to pay attention is a gift from God. Some of us cannot pay attention. All the while we are making running commentaries in our mind, doing business, entertaining anxieties ; we hear the word, we do not hear the music ; we hear the syllables, we do not catch the meaning. To hear, a man should pray an hour before he comes into God's house.

Looking at this as a model sermon for all time, the preacher is justified in preaching practically. A mistake is often made about this matter of practical preaching. If a man denounce the iniquities of his day he is thought to be a practical preacher. To a certain extent he is entitled to that designation. If I were to denounce theatres (as usually understood), racecourses, public-houses, gambling tables, I should be thought to be a most practical preacher, and within a given limit—a very small one, albeit—I should be preaching practically and usefully. That work needs to be done, must be done. If it is not done, a very solemn duty remains undischarged. But he, too, is a practical preacher who encourages men to try to be better and to do better. He also is a practical preacher who says, "Young man, you failed there, but pluck up your spirits ; try again ; God bless you ; try to do better next time." He also is a practical preacher who recognises the sufferings of those who come to God's house to hear his word. Sorrow is as great a fact as sin. There is not a heart here to-day that is not aching, or that will not ache by-and-by, or perhaps that has not already had days and nights of aching. I take you man for man, pew after pew, and the mourners outnumber those who have nothing but gladness. The preacher, therefore, is a practical preacher who recognises that fact, and speaks comfortably, who delivers healing gospels to broken hearts, who deals out bread to the hungry, and who gives the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. I often want to hear such a preacher myself, namely, the man who takes the high and bright view of things, who shows me that my pain is for my good, that my loss is the beginning of my riches, that all discipline and chastening, though for the present anything but joyous, yea, truly grievous, will afterwards yield me results that will make the soul nobler and tenderer.

II.

CHRIST'S OBJECT AS A PREACHER.

EVANGELICAL PREACHING—CHRIST'S INJUNCTION TO THE CHURCH—
CHARMING THE POOR BY MUSIC—THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION.

TEXT : "To save that which was lost."—LUKE xix. 10.

THE preacher is bound to set before himself a distinct object. The question which he ought to propose is this : What is my purpose in this discourse? Is it to instruct, convince, or comfort? Is it to convince sinners, or is it to edify believers? He must be perfectly familiar with the end at which he is aiming, or he will spend his time in fighting uncertainly, and in beating the air. The preacher will always find his object in his text. What was Jesus Christ's object as a preacher? To save men. If that was the object of the Master, should the servant have any lower end in view?

But let us look at that word "*save*." Like many other simple-looking words, it is very large in its application. It is not to be limited to one point. Men are to be saved from sin—certainly primarily. But does the word "save" end there? Men are to be saved from ignorance, to be saved from error, to be saved from the bondage of the letter, from false worship, from self-confidence, from despair; so that this word "save," which looked so little and so simple, stretches itself over our whole life—of guilt, action, ignorance, behaviour, spirit. It includes in its holy purpose the whole circle of our being. I wish we could thoroughly understand this, and we should be more liberal and more just in our construction of what our ministers are endeavouring to do for us. When the preacher is refuting a false doctrine he is as certainly endeavouring to save men as when he stands by the very cross of the one Saviour, and speaks of nothing but the reconciling and all-cleansing blood. Men say to us, "Preach the simple gospel." What is simple? and why should there be any difficulty about the simple gospel? When we preach apparently otherwise it is not because the gospel is wanting in simplicity, but because sin, vice, is manifold in its duplicity. The ten commandments are not ten because virtue is divisible into ten mysteries; they are ten because vice has a ten-fold aspect, and must be met in every phase and attitude.

Our whole conception about preaching, so as to save men, needs enlargement and purification. Only let a man cry out for the space of half an hour, "Come to Jesus, come to Jesus, just now ; come to Jesus, just now ;" and he is thought to be preaching the gospel. To me he would be preaching no gospel. I am so constituted that I must instantly ask him to define his terms. "Come—" What is the meaning of that short word? Is it easy, is it a child's walk, is it a luxury, is it a natural expression of the intellect and conscience and will? *Why* come? And *how*? Thus that which appeared to be so simple, small as a grain of mustard seed, when I plant it or sow it, it becomes a great tree, outbranching widely, and shaking questions and difficulties from every twig of the gigantic fabric. So I must ask for definition of terms.

Another man might preach to me and never mention the name of Jesus, and yet he would so preach as to make me unhappy ; he would so deal with my life, showing its mystery, its pain, its poverty, its self-helplessness, as to make me cry out, "What shall I do?" And when he had wrought that question in me, and brought it to my tongue, then he would unfold the infinite and unsearchable riches of Christ.

Now this was Jesus Christ's method of gaining his object. When I say "his method" I speak a millionfold term. When you heard him, though it were the thousandth time, you felt as if you had never heard him before—so new was he, vital, true, sympathetic, beautiful. The chariots of God are twenty thousand. Does he always ride forth in one chariot, so that you can tell it is the King by the chariot he rides in? No. Twenty thousand and thousands of thousands are his angels. So in the ministry of Christ I find innumerable methods, all converging upon one object. Watch that marvellous ministry. Jesus Christ told stories—about a man who had two sons, about a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, about a woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal, about innumerable other things, and he so told them that little children quickened their ears, and looked with eyes full of wonder. The busy man stopped with foot half way up in the air to hear what next he would say with that magical, mysterious, musical voice. He created fine fancies of the mind, as, for example, "A sower went forth to sow," "The kingdom of heaven is like to a net thrown into the midst of the sea." He asked questions. When they would not admit him into the house as a preacher, he went in as a doctor. Every preacher ought to be a healing man, a physician. He said, "If you will not have me as the Son of God, come to reveal the Father—where is your poor child that is sick? I will raise the little life up again." And once he was so busy breaking bread that you would have thought he was the world's housekeeper. Martha never was so busy as was her Lord just then, and for what purpose? What does he mean by all this?—to *save* men, to get a hold over them, to win their

attention, to conciliate their confidence, and then to open their wondering and delighted eyes to the light of the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we must adopt a roundabout method in trying to secure our object as Christian teachers. Instead of sharply clashing with prejudice, we might diffidently ask a question. Instead of bluntly asking a man about his Christian condition, we might delicately ask him about his children. Instead of giving a man a tract, we might sometimes politely offer him the paper of the day. Only we should have our object always in view, and it should always be sovereign, supreme, holy. This was the Apostle Paul's method. He tells us exactly how it was with him in his ministry. "I made myself servant unto all that I might gain the more. Unto the Jew I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things unto all men, that I might by all means save some." When will the church learn this great lesson? The church is not fertile in invention; the church is not quick and full in suggestion and adaptation; the church is stiff, iron, stolid, wanting in elasticity and power of accommodation to the ever-changing phases and necessities of the time. If Paul had lived now how would he have modernised that paragraph in his letter to the Corinthians? "To the outsiders I became an outsider, to the musical I became musical, to the scientific I became scientific, to the man of the world I became as a man of the world, that by all means I might gain, save, bless, some." And to what pass have we come? This—"If they will not come to me, I will not go to them. I have my church, and my service at eleven in the morning and seven in the evening, and if they will not come to me I will not go to them. I have so many hymns and prayers and readings. I begin at a point and end at a point, and I do the same all the year round; my programme never changes. If they come, so be it; if they stay away, so be it." An un-Christly speech, an ungodly and unholy position!

Look at this matter in a practical light. As a matter of fact, nine-tenths of the places of worship in London on Sunday night are almost deserted. Some of them are perhaps half full, in others there is what is called "a nice sprinkling." In many churches there are less than fifty men of any size and force. Now there must be a reason for this. Let us faithfully ask, What is that reason? It is either that the attraction at church is very poor, or that there is a greater attraction elsewhere. Let me, as a Christian teacher, ask myself the question, seriously, Is the singing cheerless, is the preaching dull, is the service too long, would some other method better gain the attention of the population than the method which I am adopting? If men will not have my methods ought I not to change them? If they would like a parable, a story, a high imagining about the kingdom

of heaven, ought I not to endeavour to supply these? If I cannot supply them, ought I not to retire and make way for the man who can? What changes can I introduce so as to gain some and save some? This is the question which the church dare not ask.

What is the remedy for all this? Christ gives us the remedy. We must leave the ninety-and-nine and go out. I stop there,—*Go out*. O wondrous word! Go out. How far! Far as the prodigal has strayed! Go out from old methods, old usages, old conventionalities, old habitudes, old institutionalisms. Go out. How far—how long? *Until we find it*. The church dare not do this; the church is paralysed with timidity. Sydney Smith said the church was dying of dignity; its dignity is now drivelled down into timidity. Think of those great churches—I mean by churches all kinds of places of worship—standing nearly empty every Sunday night in the year. Why not have music in them? Music would fill them; music would startle the old echoes; music would make the walls wonder what was the matter with them. Music—God's first-born angel! Try music. Why not have lectures? Observe, where there is no need of these things I do not advocate their introduction. If a church can be filled because a man is going to read a chapter of the Bible, and do nothing else, I should say that was the highest triumph of modern civilisation. If a church can be filled to hear a sermon preached about Jesus and sin, and truth, and God, and Heaven, so much the better; but when you find the people running away from you, abandoning your churches, leaving your finest edifices almost wholly empty, then leave the ninety-and-nine old methods, plans, programmes, and go out after that which is lost, and do not come back until you have found it.

How many noble church organs are standing dumb to-night that might be doing the work of God in the minds and hearts of the people. They will be used here and there for the purpose of eking out the ebbing life of some aged and asthmatic common metre tune mumbled by persons of decaying respectability, when they might be interpreting infinite and thrilling melodies to hearts in which baffled hope is dying. God made the organ! He who orders the winds out of their caves, and makes the ocean roar its hoarse amen, fills the air with birds of varying note, and makes the rills drip music as they fall down from mountain slopes, and sends the wide rivers singing to the sea, there to merge their liquid treble in creation's ancient bass—he whose deafening thunders seem to shake the universe, he, mighty God, put it into the mind and heart of man to make that king of instruments, the organ, which can announce a jubilee or bless a mourner's heart. Yet we lock it up and hide the key, and must not have too much of it, though there be poor people to-night in many of these places round about us who would be glad to come in and hear the thousand-throated instrument, speaking its gospel of soothing and hope.

Some persons would rather hear themselves humming and booming like lost bumble bees than they would admit stringed instruments into the house of God. I say let us by *all* means seek to save some. If they will not hear the preacher preach, let them hear the organ play. If they will not hear the preacher theologise, let them hear the lecturer expound and instruct and startle by many a happy suggestion. By *all* means let us try to save some. You will be forgiven on the last day if you can say that you did stretch a point here and there, and you did really venture to do something irregular and almost eccentric in order to charm the drunkard from the public-house, and the sensualist from his den of iniquity, and the wayfarer from his strolling, and the prodigal from his wilderness. You meant it well. What will he say—Man of the parable and the story, and the bread-baking and the child-kissing—what will he say? “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful according to thy light and opportunity; enter into the joy of thy Lord.”

Many of you could help very much in gaining some and in saving others. Why don't you who have this gift of preaching by music take the schoolroom belonging to your several churches, and invite the poor old people round about who would not be admitted into concerts, to hear any kind of music you could give them?—a nice bright little song, sometimes a hymn, put in by stealth, as it were. What kind of people? Why, just the poorest old crones you could gather—nobody to come in who had the slightest trace of respectability about him, the door shut in the face of every man who has one sixpence to rub upon another. Poor old bodies, with their knitting, it may be, or their sewing—poor worn mothers, with two or three children in their arms, who have not seen their husbands for many hours—get them in. But perhaps they will—they will—spoil the place? Let them spoil it. I like to see a place spoiled in that sort of way. “Lord, here is the place, unspoiled; no paint scratched off, no varnish interfered with, every chair in a nice cleanly condition. This is how we kept our place, but we took care never to open the church night or day more than we could help.” What will he say? May I not be there to hear!

Now what I have said about one department outside the church, namely, music, I would say, if time permitted, about fifty others, and ask you music people, literary people, persons who can contribute towards the enjoyment of the people, especially the poor—I would have you say, each of you, “What is my talent, and how can I spend it so as to *save* some?” I want allies of all kinds, lieutenants big and little; I want men to be doing all they can, each in his own way, and all meaning the same thing, namely, the gaining and saving of men. I take Jesus Christ's idea of preaching, which he turned into the widest institution upon the earth. It included feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, healing those that were ill, working miracles, preaching the truth, revealing God, pronouncing

benedictions, denouncing public sins, encouraging the young and the old—a great ministry. He who built that great sky, and filled it with worlds so many and so bright, must have grand and gracious conceptions about any ministry that is meant to teach and save and bless the immortal soul.

Why is it so difficult to save men? We say, "If this gospel is of God surely it will at once vindicate itself and save the souls of them who hear it." The salvation of men is the supreme difficulty of God. The question you have just put would be to me the most disturbing and distressing of all questions if we could not relieve it by others which do not come strictly within the power of reason to answer. Why do men need to hear more than one appeal to come to the Saviour according to the way he has laid down himself in his blessed word and testimony? One would suppose that, with a divine message, a man had simply to stand at the place of the concourse of people, and say, "This is God's message," and instantly all hearts would yield their homage and their love. How can we relieve the fearful mystery?—by suggesting, or rather calling to mind, the fact, how difficult it is to do right in *any* direction. Do you know how difficult it is to get any man to be thoroughly *clean*? I do not say difficult to get a man to wash his hands, but to be thoroughly clean and to love cleanliness. Do you know how exceedingly difficult it is to get some persons to be *punctual*? Why, to be punctual—they do not know the meaning of the word. You say, "Eight o'clock is the time." They will be there at half-past nine, or they will forget the appointment altogether, or they will come the day after. Do you know how exceedingly difficult it is to get some people to pay their debts? To pay—they are not to the manner born.

Now I use these outside illustrations, only on an inferior level, to lead you up step by step to the crowning difficulty. Do you know how difficult it is to get a man to say absolutely what he means? When Jesus Christ said, "Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay," he seemed to be talking a very small kind of talk, but where is the man whose yes means yes without a taint or shadow of no in it? Have you thought of that? Where is the man whose speech is dazzlingly true? The most of us speak what is generally true, relatively true, substantially true, true with a grain of salt, with a mental reservation, with a suppressed parenthesis—but dazzlingly true, transparently and gleamingly true! If it be so difficult in these matters to do that which is right, can you not see, through them, how possibly it may be the supreme difficulty of the universe to save men? Jesus Christ said, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." The great difficulty for us is to do right in any way. Now, if you could show me that it is so natural and so easy for men to do right in every other way that they ought to accept the gospel if it were true, I would say you had urged against this divine testimony a very powerful argument. But the whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint. Through and through, up and

down, we are wounds and bruises and putrefying sores ; the right hand is crippled, and the left hand is withered, and the head is giddy, and the heart irregular, and the foot skilled in going backwards. What wonder, when the grand climax, the sovereign appeal is reached, to surrender to God and to love him, we should come upon the supreme difficulty !

What, then, is left the preacher to do to himself, and to those who hear him ?—to proclaim the gospel, to speak of human sin and Christ's precious blood, to announce the grand catastrophe of evil, and the grander remedy of God's holiness in Christ. That is all he can do except to announce the consequences of the rejection or acceptance of his ministry. The rejection—"The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God. These shall go away into everlasting punishment. There is no more sacrifice for sins. The door will be shut. Many will say to me, Lord, open unto us, but I will say, I never knew you. Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." And the minister dare not trifle with these terms. They are not given to him to gloss, amend, soften, but to utter with self-suppression and with tearfulness. The result of acceptance—"Ye shall find rest unto your souls. Your sins, which are many, will all be forgiven you. Let the wicked turn unto the Lord, for he will abundantly pardon. Great peace have they that love thy law."

Thus promise after promise must the speaker pronounce to them who receive the word with joy. This I would humbly, reverently do now. My friend, are you hearing the gospel for the thousandth time, and yet have not received it ? Are you going to reject it now ? This may be your last visit to God's house. Think ! Are you going to receive Christ to-night, saying, "Well, he endeavoured by all means to save some, he shall save me. Lord, receive me, save me ; open thine arms, and I will flee to thee" ? Are you going to say that ? There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth.

III.

CHRIST'S QUALIFICATIONS AS A PREACHER.

THE NECESSITY OF CHARACTER—CHRIST'S INTELLECTUAL RESOURCES—
WHAT WE OWE TO THE ENEMY—THE VARIETY OF CHRIST'S METHOD.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour, and not ours only, but the Saviour of the whole world, who by his precious blood answered all the accusation of thy law. He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, and there is none other, and we now accept him as thy gift, the very utterance and expression of thine own infinite love. We rejoice to know that there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus ; we come therefore to thee, through him alone : in him is our worthiness, in him is our strength, and if we are dumb before thee, it is that he himself may pray for us.

We thank thee that we still have an interest in the affairs of thy kingdom. Time doth not charm us, and all the earth with its fulness and all the sea with its music cannot content us. We declare plainly that we seek a country ; our eyes are lifted up, and we seek a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Thou hast stirred us by a Divine ambition, thou art moving us by heavenly impulses, the unrest which disturbs our heart is itself a blessing, calling upon us to arise and work and serve and wait and suffer until the end, which is full of light, shall come.

Wherein we have done wrong in thy sight do thou now exercise thy mercy, that the miracle of thy forgiveness may exceed the marvel of our guilt. Thou hast an answer to us in Christ Jesus : he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. Lo, this is thy gospel, to our heart when it smites itself with accusation, and to our conscience when it rises threateningly and demands our life. Help us to find rest in Christ, refuge in the cross, and peace in the holy blood—then let thy word dwell in us richly as a new life and a new light, the very glory of Heaven, the very peace of God. So shall we have an answer to every tempter, a refuge in the time of every tempest, and our peace shall be complete, because it is of the nature of the tranquillity of God. Help us to use our time well : may no talent be wrapped up and laid aside, may we be living at every point of our character, yea, may there be no death in us at all ; even now may we lay hold upon our immortality and bring to bear upon the things of the dying day the power of an endless life.

Where there is sorrow of heart this day, surprise the sorrowful with new joys : where there is a sense of blankness and emptiness because of the visitations of thy bereaving providence, do thou fill up such blankness with thy presence more fully than ever thou hast yet done. When the tears are in the eyes and the sob is suppressed in the heart, bring thy gospel in all its tender solaces and infinite consolations

to bear upon the bruised and heavy laden. Interpret unto us the meaning of the grave that is dug under our own hearthstone—show us why death is a continual guest at our table, and do thou thus interpret unto us the mystery of life and give unto us the piety which sees the bright view, the far and celestial outlook, that anticipates the resurrection, the utter and lasting destruction of death. Then shall our voices mingle with the sweet hymn in thy house that gives thee praise for all thy dispensation, and the psalm that adores thee shall have in it the utterance of our love.

TEXT : “ The Lord hath anointed me to preach.”—ISAIAH lxi. I.

CHRIST'S supreme qualification as a preacher was that he himself was the Word made flesh, was both the text and the sermon, the doctrine and its exemplification. That must be the qualification of his ministers : in such degree as is possible to them they must be incarnations of the very spirit and perfection of God. They will not, of course, succeed in this, but they will press towards the mark for the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus. I am not aware that any promise is given to genius or learning, in the matter of expounding the Divine word, but exceeding great and precious promises are given to modesty, humility, trust, child-like love, transparent, ingenuous simplicity. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The Lord resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the humble. You will find at the basis of Christ's ministry what must be at the basis of every ministry that is divine, true, and beneficent—solid character. This is the character of Jesus Christ :—Without sin ; a just man ; innocent blood ; no fault in him ; he did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. That is the basis of all vital and lasting influence in every man. In the long run character goes for most. Tongues cease, prophecy fails, eloquence is dumb, and music is silent, but character, charity, love, abideth forever.

You mistake Jesus Christ if you think of him as a miracle-worker only. He made nothing of his miracles, except as means to ends. He was never intoxicated by the eulogiums of the people who said, “ Never man spake like this Man,” who wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth like rich, deep rivers running in green pastures. He was not stopped in his course by being applauded as the most perfect, graceful, and eloquent speaker of his time, a magician in the use of words and a master in their application. All those trivial compliments he despised : he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners—with us, above us, here, yonder, on earth, in Heaven—that weird mystery that eternally frightens all wickedness. He was more than a merely good man—that, being a very doubtful description, may mean much that Jesus Christ would have resented. He was holy, he was in deep sympathy with God, he dwelt in the secret place of the Almighty, he made his habitation in the Lord, whereas in our case the temple may have a thousand pinnacles

flashing in the sun, and on every pinnacle a thousand marble gods, but the temple itself is on the sand, and the wind will carry it away.

First of all, there must be in all Christian teachers, public or private, high or obscure, solid, indestructible *character*. But there will be imperfections? Certainly. Mistakes, failures in judgment, sometimes actions that seem to mock the very first suggestions of common sense? Truly. These things do not touch *character*. You may fall a thousand times a day, and still there may be in you that seed of the divine sonship which the devil cannot steal, and which winter cannot bind up in more than temporary frost. When I speak of character, I do not speak of what is termed outward and visible perfection—a mechanically-wrought contrivance of expediencies, which challenge the most jealous and critical human eye—but of an inner kingdom of spirit, conviction, sympathy, purpose, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. Peter fell: Peter was not lost. All men have fallen, yet man shall be saved. This is a great mystery, but I speak to those who understand it by many a suffering, by many a grief, by many a tragedy too sacred for words.

Not only was Christ holy, he was *called*. It is not every good man that is called to preach. Jesus Christ was distinctly called to this high work of the ministry. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek. He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him." "God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him." God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power. Thus, then, Jesus Christ was a holy Man—I now take the merely human view of the case—distinctly and specifically called of God to preach a certain gospel. It is beautiful to think that almost every man, when he is converted, wants to be a minister. Do not ridicule the young ambition. There is an element of grandeur—shall I say of divinity?—about it. Have I ever received a young man into the church who did not come to me soon after and say that he felt as if he would like to be a minister, a preacher of the truth which has made him what he is in his new life? Yea, in that first love, in that early passion of consecration, he is willing to be a missionary—an enthusiasm which often dies out too soon. He says he will be a home missionary, he will even be an evangelist; his love is so simple, large, and pure, that he will be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord. Well, it is morally beautiful, it is spiritually pathetic, exquisite in the perfectness of its delicacy, and in the subtlety of its deepest meanings, yet every man is not called to be a minister. I gently discourage all I can from being preachers. My gentle discouragements will do them no harm: if God

really means to have them in this work, he will know where to find them and how to call them. You cannot mistake fire—was fire ever mistaken for anything else? It is a baptism of fire with which God anoints his chosen ones. It is fire that makes the difference between one man and another; it is not intelligence, it is not the mere use of words. The most copious speakers I have ever heard in my life have been to me the most inane and pointless. What was wanted? Fire. Who can despise it? None. Who can feel it? All. Be quiet, then, for the time, my neophyte; see whether it is really God's fire that is under thee, and in thee, and round about thee—it cannot easily be put out, and there will be no mistaking it by-and-by.

Men are *called* to be what they are. Every musician is called of God. Do you suppose that every man who has ten fingers can play the organ? Do you suppose that every man who has large lungs can play upon a trumpet to the instruction and edification of those who hear him—to their lifting up and their resurrection? Every poet is called to make his verse: he is anointed of God. Herein is that saying true which a Frenchman spoke, to whom it was said, "It must be very difficult to make epic verses." Said he, "No: easy, or impossible." Every tradesman is called to his employment, if he be in the right sphere. A tradesman cannot be made any more than a poet. I know how to account for all the failures in commercial life; either the men are not in their right places, and were never meant for those places, or there is that necessary want of energy and genius, tact and perseverance, which comes out of antipathy to the pursuit. Train up a child in the way he should go, catch God's idea concerning him, interpret the Divine idea in the creation of his life, and then you will have a natural, symmetrical, and happy development of faculty and energy and love, and at the last you will have a life beautiful for its completeness and utility.

I am not sure that any man has yet made enough of Christ's intellectual resources as a preacher. I do not remember any essay upon the intellect of Christ. We, of course, as Evangelical Christians, believe him to have been God the Son—that is the central fact in my Christian faith. But speaking of him now as a historical character, merely as a preacher, a speaker, a teacher of men, I feel that we have not dwelt sufficiently upon the intellectual virility, fecundity, and majesty of Christ. Only this morning the idea occurred to me how his intellectual power is displayed in the hell which he described in the lesson I have just read. Thinking of my service this morning, that conception of hell came before me as one of the finest exemplifications of the intellectual power of Christ, and therefore I determined to read to you, as I have now done, that solemn and mysterious parable concerning the rich man and Lazarus. I will risk my whole contention as to Christ's intellectual supremacy upon that one parable. I read

Dante's hell till I became familiar with it : it is a poet labouring to kindle a hell with fagots of words, and the trick is well done. But you may multiply words till you work in the hearer a familiarity which makes him a critic upon the very hell you meant him to fear. What a hell is this, in the passage we have just read ! "Have mercy on me,"—the man is in a place, for the first time in his being, where mercy never came,—“send Lazarus” —the humiliation that forms part of the final penalty—“that he may dip the tip of his finger in water”—the very least blessing magnified into a redemption—“and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.” *He* made that hell who made the parable of the Prodigal Son ! These colours are thrown on with a master's touch : there is no labour here. Dante's hell is a perdition which the poet has dreamed, Christ's hell is a pit which he has seen.

All the parables indicate the supreme intellectual majesty of Christ. There was no end to his inventiveness. All his parables are original. To-day we have books of anecdotes, thick books, sold for ministerial use, that the minister may feather his arrows with anecdotes imagined by other men. If I told you twenty anecdotes, I should have borrowed them from various sources. Christ made his anecdotes, invented his parables, elaborated, out of an inexhaustible genius, all the beautiful pictures which he hung up before the eye and the fancy of his hearers. Gather them altogether into one gallery, mark their contrasts, their varieties—hardly any two of them alike—why, he who made the flowers made these paradisaical plants ; they bear the same signature, they have about them the same mystery—alike, dissimilar, identical, separate—all the widest contrasts possible to imagination. The parable of the Sower and the parable of Dives and Lazarus came out of the same mind. The parable of the Good Samaritan, and the parables by which the kingdom of heaven is illustrated in twenty different shining lights, all came out of the same mind ; and that mind had never been at school, that mind was an untrained peasant's mind, that mind never knew letters in the rabbinical and scholastic sense of the term, and yet it grew those flowers, like a garden tilled by an invisible hand, of which God was the husbandman. Collect these things, dwell upon them, and see how they add up to—*Deity !*

But the instantaneousness of the speech was as remarkable as its inventiveness. Christ's was not the art that conceals art, not the trick of a preacher who can have a long written sermon before him, and yet be so reading it as to appear not to be reading it at all. Jesus Christ knew nothing of our homiletic tricks. He had no time to prepare some of his sublimest utterances ; they were retorts. How long would it take me to make the parable of the Good Samaritan ? Would you begrudge me three days if I asked that time in which to make the parable ? I believe you would willingly grant me that space for preparation. How long did Christ

take? An immeasurable moment. The tempting lawyer said, "Who is my neighbour?" And he, answering, said—. Then came that beautiful utterance: not a three days' thinking, not a week's preparation, but an answer out of the abundance of the heart. The heart that could give such utterances every day was not a peasant's heart only, it was—God's.

All the most beautiful parables of Christ were spoken in reply to the enemy. "Then drew near to him the publicans and the sinners to hear him. And he said, 'A certain man had two sons.'" Then came the parable of the Prodigal Son. Look at Christ's knowledge of human nature. He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man. That was one of his supreme qualifications as a public expounder of Divine mysteries. He knew his audience; he knew his material. A great musician says, "I must know my organ." One of the greatest musicians in our land says, that before you can play any organ you must get out of your memory every other organ you ever touched, and must make the particular instrument to be played upon a separate and independent study. Jesus Christ knew every string in the instrument he had to play. Socrates says the orator must be all man. Jesus Christ needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.

This must be the secret of our power as preachers and teachers and private expositors of the Divine mysteries. Not to know human nature is to be ignorant. To know human nature is to speak all languages. Some men have the spirit of burning who have not the spirit of judgment in this matter. What shall we say of a young man who, in the excess of his zeal, was giving away religious tracts, and to two acquaintances of my own, two very respectable citizen-mothers, two ladies of the highest character, this young man gave a tract, each on the subject of *profane swearing*? You could hardly believe any such idiocy: you could scarcely believe that any man could perpetrate so foul an irony. If thou dost not know human nature thy ministry will be a pitiful failure. Know how to speak to every man. If he is a weakling who comes to thee, chaffer like a weakling, and make him feel like a hail fellow well met, and he will go away saying, "Well, really, he is not such a great man as I thought he was: I felt as if we were just standing on a level." That's right. That is genius. And when the great man comes to talk to thee, speak in another language—take him on his own level, and he will say as he is going away, "I did not expect to find so superior and distinguished a man." That is genius. To the weak, weak; to the strong, strong; to the shrewd, shrewd; to the simple, simple; to all men, all things. So was Christ. A ruler among the Jews could talk to him till his flesh crept as if ghosts were tormenting him all over, and a woman at a well could talk to him and ask him questions, and little children could go up to him and toddle about him as if they had the right to do so, and kings and procurators

turned pale in his presence, and were made silent by his silence. He looked at them till they were afraid of themselves. He knew what was in man, yet he was a peasant, a carpenter, a Nazarene—whence had this Man this wisdom? And echo answers, “Whence?” And the answer only comes from eternity.

Then consider what an eye he had for the suggestiveness of the material world. A sparrow falling to the ground, a lily growing, a ship sailing, the fields whitening unto the harvest, the sky lowering, red at night, red in the morning—all things helped him to make his ministry clearer, fuller, stronger. The whole heaven and earth became to him a great gallery of illustration; every star was a teacher, every flower had in it the power of suggesting to him deeper and ever deeper truth. Lift up thine eyes and behold; seek not in thy worm-eaten books for new revelations, seek for them in God’s lights and God’s flowers, old as immemorial time, new as the dew that was made out of the viscid vapours last night.

Jesus Christ availed himself of every method. What was Jesus Christ’s method of preaching? You cannot tell. The chariots of God are twenty thousand. He taught; then his voice fell into a conversational tone; he was expository, communicative, illuminative; he took words, and terms, and phrases to pieces; he went back upon the old writings, and put them into new forms—set them so that they could catch the light at angles hitherto unilluminated. He solemnly, quietly taught the people, spoke with infinite dignity, scarcely seemed to move a finger or a feature; in the deepest sense of infinite quiet and peace, he taught the people. His words were light, his sentences were baptisms, his expositions were revelations—the quietness overawed and soothed the auditors.

That was one method. Was he always the same? No. He *cried*. I should like to have heard the uplifting of his voice. “And Jesus stood—on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood”—usually he sat to teach the people, but on that day he stood, full height, expanded to the utmost of his dignity, “And cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” Not a note lost, every tone alighting upon every man as if the whole of it belonged to him, an entire gospel for his thirsting soul. So it is this day—the thirst is here, it burns our heart, it scorches our tongue, it dries up our whole life, and still that sweet, resonant voice is lifted up in its cry of welcome, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.”

Was that his only method—of teaching and crying? No: he *entreated*. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, beautiful as a sister, tender as a mother, city of cities, how often would I have gathered thee and thou wouldst not be gathered. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door I will come in.”

These were the methods of Christ : he taught quietly as a sage, cried loudly like an evangelist, wooed, entreated, persuaded, warned—like one whose whole life was love, and who lived in the pain and agony of his affection.

These were Jesus Christ's qualifications : a solid, holy character, a specific, Divine call, an intellectual power more than equal to every occasion, an inventiveness never rivalled in its fecundity, an instantaneousness that outran the lightning, a knowledge of human nature that looked into every vein and fibre of our life and soul, an eye for the beautiful and grand in physical creation, and a method diversified, so that to have heard him once was to have known nothing about him. He taught, he cried, he entreated, he came in all ways that he might bring us to God.

In which way will you come ? Do you yield to teaching ? Jesus taught. Do you answer appeal ? Jesus appealed. Do you say you are not to be driven, you are to be led ? Jesus entreated, and yearned, and persuaded, and waited for, till a mother would have tired and a father would have died. "What more could I do ?" saith he. He has been to us Father and Mother, Sister, Shepherd, and Nurse and Friend, a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? How can your genius for escape exceed his genius for redemption ? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

IV.

CHRIST'S TEXTS AS A PREACHER.

CHRIST'S WAY OF GETTING TEXTS—CHRIST'S PRIVATE EXPOSITIONS—
WHO WAS THEIR PREACHER?—AN APPEAL TO ALL.

TEXT: "When he marked."—LUKE xiv. 7.

WHERE did Jesus Christ get his texts? We have what we call our text-book, and we go to it in order that we may find passages for the purposes of exposition and application. Where did Jesus Christ, pre-eminently *the* preacher, get his texts? His sermons were always new, always bright with a light above the brightness of the sun, often tender with a pathos which made his hearers' hearts burn within them. He got some of his texts from the Old Testament, we know. Those texts are given. He was familiar with Moses, with the Psalms, and with the prophets, with the whole ancient Scriptures, and in every line of those venerable writings he found some trace and token of himself. Was there any other book which he read? If so, I should like to know its name, and to have it in my keeping. There was one great book which he read every day; out of that open volume he brought many texts, most startling and most suggestive. That book is not in the British Museum, nor is it in the Bodleian, nor was it burnt in some of the ancient libraries. It is all men's book, to be had without money and without price. It is written in the largest capitals; the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein; and my purpose in the discourse of this morning is to accompany you in listening to Jesus Christ as he takes some of his texts out of that voluminous and ever-open book.

Let us begin with Luke, chapter xiv., verse 7: "And he put forth a parable to them which were bidden, when he marked how they. . . ." The book of daily life was Christ's great text-book. What every man did gave him a subject; every word he heard started a novel theme. We poor preachers of this nineteenth century often cannot find a text, and say to one another, "What have you been preaching about? I wish I could get hold of another subject or two." Poor professional dunderheads! and the great book of life, joy, sorrow, tragedy, comedy, is open night and day. Jesus Christ put forth a parable, not after he had been shutting him-

self up for a fortnight, and reading the classic literature of immemorial time, but when he marked *how they*. . . . Keep your eyes open if you would preach well—keep your eyes open upon the moving panorama immediately in front of you, omit nothing, see every line and every hue, and hold your ear open to catch every tone, loud and sweet, low and full of sighing, and all the meaning of the masonry of God. Jesus Christ was, in this sense of the term, pre-eminently an extemporaneous speaker, not an extemporaneous thinker. There is no occasion for all your elaborate preparation of words if you have had an elaborate preparation of—yourself. Herein the preacher would do well, not so much to prepare his sermon as to prepare himself, his life, his manhood, his soul. As for the words, let him rule over them, call them like servants to do his behest, and order them to express his regal will.

What sermons our Saviour would have if he stood here now! He would mark how that man came in and tried to occupy two seats all to himself—a cunning fellow, a man who has great skill in spreading his coat out and looking big, so as to deceive a whole staff of stewards. What a sermon he would have evoked on selfishness, on want of nobleness and dignity of temper, how the Lord would have shown him how to make himself half the size, so as to accommodate some poor weak person who has struggled miles to be here, and is obliged to stand. I have been enabled to count the number of pews from the front of the pulpit where the man is. I paused there. My Lord—keener, truer—would have founded a sermon on the ill-behaviour. He would have spoken about us all. He would have known who came here through mere curiosity, who was thinking about finery and amusement, who was shop-keeping even in the church, buying and selling to-morrow in advance; and upon every one of us, preacher and hearers, he would have founded a discourse. Do you wonder now at his graphic, vivid talk? Do you wonder now whence he got his accent? Can you marvel any longer to what he was indebted for his emphasis, his clearness, his directness of speech, his practical exhortation? He put forth a parable when he marked how they—did the marketing, dressed themselves, trained or mistreated their families, went to church for evil purposes, spoke hard words about one another, took the disennobling, instead of the elevating, view of their neighbours' work and conversation. The hearers gave that preacher his text, and what they gave he took and sent back again in flame or in blessing. Observe, "when he *marked*"—when he marked how Beaconsfield went into the Berlin Congress with the island of Cyprus in his pocket; when he marked how ecclesiastical livings are bought and sold in the auction-room; when he marked how his church is broken up into a hundred contending sections; when he marked how envious one preacher is of another, and how anxious to pluck at least one feather out of his cap; when he marked how

eloquent men are in gossip and how dumb in prayer—*then* he opened his mouth in parables which were judgments, and in allegories which filled their guilty hearers with fear.

Now let us listen to him again. In Matthew, chapter xiii., verses 2 and 3: "When great multitudes came to him" what did he do? Mark the divinity of the Man. See where his mastery lay. "He"—I would that every ear might catch this—"He spake many things." It is in such little out-of-the-way touches as these that I see what he was. How to handle a multitude? With one string, with one idea, with one little mean method of attack? No, no. Seeing the multitudinous spectacle, he delivered a multitudinous address. A multitude cannot all be like one man—trained, cultured, critical, right up to the highest point of intellectual perception and moral sympathy. Where you have an almost infinite number of persons, you have a corresponding number of conditions, circumstances, tastes. That speaker is the Divine one who speaks many things, who has not one little drop of dew to let fall upon a host, but a great shower of rich rain, so that every soul may have its own baptism and go home with its own blessing.

A marvellous chapter is that 13th of Matthew. What parables are in it—the sower, the woman with the leaven, the tares sown among the wheat, the pearl of great price, and many others. Why so many parables? That everybody might have something. You are sitting there, a well-trained scholar, and you want a continuous, concatenated discourse, culminating in some dazzling and convincing climax. The man next you has hardly put off his shop apron, and his hands still have the shop dust on them, and he wants something to be going on with. And the little child to whom life is a dream, a wonder, a mystery, a dance, half begun yet nearly ended—wants an anecdote, a story, and you say, "Pooh, pooh, nothing but anecdotes; just a string of anecdotes from beginning to end;" and you don't like anecdotes, and you like logic—strong, persistent, inexorable, relentless logic. The man next you cannot spell logic, and if he could spell it he could hardly pronounce it, and if he could pronounce it he could not define it, and he wants a figure of speech, a little story, a bright parable, truth in a blossom, a gospel in a flower; he could understand that. So when Jesus saw great multitudes come to him, he spake many things; the scholar had a portion of meat, and so had the illiterate, and the little child had its cut of living bread, and the poor creature who was too feeble to lift the water to her lips has it lifted by the hand that gave it. When shall we understand this, and honour this kind of ministry, and when shall we believe that every man had his ministry in the church; the great thinker, and the great parabolist, the man who can tell an anecdote before you have time to object to it, and apply the moral so

that you waken up to find that he has been meaning you all the time? I believe that a multitudinous humanity requires a multitudinous tuition, and into the church I welcome every man who can speak one word for his Master; somebody, somewhere, wants that particular word. God bless us, every one.

Now let us be present upon another occasion. You will find the circumstance in the 5th chapter of the gospel by Matthew: "When his disciples came unto him, he opened his mouth and taught them." How different from every other discourse. He was then speaking to the church. A poor rude church it was just then; still, it was the nucleus of the visible kingdom of God upon the earth, and the only church which Jesus Christ could then have addressed. "When his disciples came to him, he opened his mouth and taught them, saying"—then came the beatitudes, the exposition of eternal laws, the application of great moral truths, calls to luminousness of character, diligence of service, nobility of temper, non-resistance of evil—to the perfectness of God's purity. No parable, no story, no anecdote, criticism, doctrine, history, dogma, great principle, solid law, exposition of righteousness, talk that went to the church's soul; and that is the basis of all doctrine and ethics in the church to this day, and shall be to the end of time.

There ought to be seasons when the church only comes together. Then we should have the richer talk; then we might be led into the inner places, where the mysteries are most sacred and most tender; then we should drink the old, old wine of God. When can this be arranged? There be many charmers that address the ear and call us elsewhere; alas! there ought to be found time when Christians should come together as Christians to read the small print, to read between the lines, to read the richer, deeper mysteries of the Divine kingdom.

When the disciples came to him he opened his mouth and taught them. It was shepherdly talk, and that leads me to offer this suggestion to you. There is pastoral preaching as well as pastoral visitation. There are some persons who are never content unless the pastor is always visiting them. Personally, I should allow them to enjoy their discontentment; they like it, they would be unhappy if they had nothing to grumble about. There is pastoral preaching, rich revelation of Divine truth, high, elevating treatment of Christian mysteries, and he is the pastor to me who does not come to drink, and smoke, and gossip, and show his littleness, but who, out of a rich experience, meets me with God's word at every turn and twist and phase of my life, and speaks the something to me that I just then want. See him when he is largest and noblest, catch him in the moods of his inspiration, and do not drag him down to make a hassock of him in the drawing-room. Know you that there is pastoral preaching, talk to the disciples alone, quiet, beautiful, sympathetic, luminous talk, that makes

the brain rejoice in a new light, (and the heart glow with a more ardent love.) May we have more and more such preaching.

Let us be present upon another occasion to find how Jesus got his texts. You will find the incident in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, verse 3: "They came unto him privately"—and how he changed his tone. I can see it was the same speaker, but the tone was dropped to the occasion. It is in these modulations of voice that I see what my Lord really was. He comes to me where I am; if I am standing outside alone, when he is passing out of the church, and I say to him, "There was one thing I did not quite understand about the sower and the seed," he will take me to the house and talk to me as earnestly as if I were a thousand men, and as quietly as if I were a bruised reed. Christ is not God to me because of some cunning application of Greek syntax: I do not outwit the Unitarian by some knowledge of Greek punctuation of which he is ignorant: it is not a question of Greek conjugation, and declension, and parsing—it is in these things, his out-of-the-way traits, these secret characteristics, these personal kindnesses, these marvellous reaches over my whole life, that I find what he is, venerable as eternity, new as the young morning, the ancient of days and the child of Bethlehem.

There are many things that are to be spoken privately about the kingdom of heaven. Herein is the great delicacy and the great difficulty of Christian teaching. You cannot proclaim everything on the house-top. How misunderstood we are when we venture in the pulpit to relate our deepest experience. I dare hardly pray in public. Some earnest and, no doubt, in his own sphere, which I never penetrated, intelligent soul wrote to me from the West of England on a post-card, to know if I really was the bad man I depicted myself in my prayers, for it had quite grieved him. Do I pray here in secret? Am I speaking about one man? Do I not try to be, as it were, your priest and intercessor, gathering up into one broad public address our inmost desires, and confessing our inmost sin? When the minister speaks in public prayer do not ten thousand hearts speak in his voice? Ah me! it is so sad that there are persons who will belittle every occasion, and will not rise to the grandeur and the dignity of the circumstances. Some things must be spoken privately, to the confidential ear, to the one listening heart: we have much of sorrow to tell, and difficulty and doubt, and secret encounter, and it is good to be enabled now and then in private to tell the story, the inner tale, to show what the heart is in its solitude, in its secret realisations of the mystery of life, the mystery of sin, and the mystery of grace. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written of that private household talk. I would there were more of it—then the household fire would never go out, the household table would never be barren of a feast.

Let us be present upon one more occasion. "Then drew near to him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him," we read in the 15th chapter of Luke. What was the discourse? In the 5th of Matthew we had the disciples coming to him, and he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness;" and now the congregation changes, and the sermon changes. What spake he when the publicans and sinners came for to hear him? Three parables that shall be read and spoken with tears wherever this gospel is preached. About the one lost sheep, about the one lost piece of money, about the one lost prodigal. The chapter that holds the tale of the prodigal son is a chapter the ink of which shall never be dry, the music of which shall never fade. But my object is now not to analyse these parables, but to direct attention to the method of this man's ministry to show you where and how he got his subjects. Methinks he would sit on the sea-shore or on the mountain-side or in the synagogue, and not know what he was going to preach till he saw the congregation he had to deal with. His disciples came to him and he said, "Blessed." Then drew near to him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him, and he spake three parables about loss and gain, and these parables set forth his gospel and the spirit of its ministry.

What say you to this Man? Give him his due: I like every man to have the palm who honestly wins it. What think you about him? He was but a peasant, he had never been to school, he had no certificate and no prizes and no rabbinical endorsement. He was but carpenter and carpenter's son: you would not expect much from him. His disciples came unto him, and he delivered a great doctrinal discourse which doctors might have heard and wondered at. When great multitudes came unto him, he spake unto them many things, so that every one in the mass might have something. When the disciples could not quite understand what he said, they came unto him privately, and he sat down in the house and went over all the truth with them, and drove it into their thick heads. When the publicans and sinners came, what did he? He spoke three parables, which he might at the moment have plucked from heaven itself, so beauteous, so musical, so pathetic, so infinitely vivid and true to the life. A few days ago I tried to show you this in particular about that young prodigal. We said: "Now we shall find out what Jesus Christ really is: he may be able to describe a virtuous man, for he knew nothing about the ways of vice, but how will he describe a rake? We shall have the laugh over him there when he comes to describe a *roue*, a rake, a spendthrift, a prodigal, a villain. He will make a poor villain, a knock-kneed villain. He will never be able to find the colours that suit a villain." I charge you to tell me, after reading the parable of the prodigal son, if he

has not drawn him to the life. Whence hath this Man this wisdom ! He who was without sin, on whose fair brow there was no wrinkle wrought by remorse, in whose voice there was no tone or sob of personal penitence, a Man whose feet had never been in the ways of evil for his own purpose, how came he to give you line by line in neutral distance, in blood tints at the front, with eyes that had prodigality in every look—how came he to draw that picture? Give him the credit that is due to him, do not begrudge him ; he needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.

Now the great practical application of this is, that you will find in Jesus Christ's talk, whoever you are, just what you want, just what you most need. What are you? A cunning, long-headed old thinker? Go to Jesus Christ. I have seen such go to him : I have seen how they marvelled as he spoke unto them. Once a deputation of that sort went to wait upon him. They got up a nice little case about a woman and seven husbands—"And the seven husbands died, and last of all the woman died also"—and the Sadducees wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection. The disciples would have shown their folly over that question. Jesus heard their tale out, and he was a magnificent listener, and when they were done, he said : "Ye do err : you are wrong fundamentally. You do not know your own Scriptures, for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God." And so these long-headed, cunning thinkers came back with their heads a long way down in their necks. They went in, tolerably young men, under fifty : they came out about five hundred years of age. He was a wonderful talker !

What are you? "I am a poor woman who has got all wrong somehow." Go and see him : he knows all the sins, and if you behave aright he will say, "Thy sins which are many"—he does not conceal them—"are all forgiven thee. Begin again, and summer will dawn in thy poor winter-bound soul."

What are you? "A thief half-damned." What, just going into hell? "Yes." Say, "Lord, remember me," and though the affairs of eternity are on his brain, he will not forget thee.

What are you? Just a poor little lad, just a wee little lassie, only a little child? Toddle up to him. Go, thread your way through the big folks as they are standing there, and put out a finger, and he will see it and you will be in his arms next moment, and that lift will bring you nearer heaven than ever you will be again on earth.

What are you? "A poor suffering creature, a poor woman with a secret sorrow, with a heavy affliction : my very heart oozing out of me, and nobody to speak to. I live in one of these lanes off Holborn. I just came in here to spend an hour : I did not know much what else to

do. My very heart is leaking away, I have no joy in life, I have tried all physicians and curatives and restoratives, and here I am just as bad as ever, perhaps worse." Go to him. I saw a dear old mother go to him in just such a plight as you. She said—I heard her say it just under her breath as women sometimes speak—"If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole." I saw the poor creature wriggling her way through the crowd, and when she thought nobody was looking, she just touched the hem of his garment and she stood upright like a tree of the Lord's right hand planting.

Go. I will go too. I need him, as you do, every day. Sometimes as a Judge, often as a Comforter, always as a Teacher, and the more I need him, the more he is.

V.

CHRIST'S FAILURE AS A PREACHER.

SYMPATHY NECESSARY IN HEARING—THE PERILS OF LITERALISM—
CHRIST DECLINED APPLAUSE—SPIRITUALITY THE SUPREME TEXT.

TEXT: "Because of their unbelief."—MATTHEW xiii. 58.

ONE would have thought that no difficulties would have stood in the way of such a preacher as Jesus Christ. The Man who could work miracles could surely clear all obstacles out of his path. So it would seem to our ignorance; but so it was not in reality. Jesus Christ complained of difficulties, and confessed his inability to remove them. Those difficulties assume a peculiar significance when we remember that Jesus Christ seemed to have all the elements that both deserve and command success. His miracles were confessed and admired on every hand. He was beyond all question the most popular speaker of his day, characterised by marvellous graciousness and completeness and wisdom of address; so much so that the most learned wondered and the most illiterate understood, and those who were most ignorant felt the coming upon them of a new and very welcome light. Still, this Man, worker of miracles and speaker of beautiful speeches, failed, in a sense which I shall presently explain, in his ministry. He did not numerically fail: great multitudes thronged him on the hill-side, and along by the sea-shore; the popularity of numbers was triumphant—it was never so seen in Israel. Yet every heart was a difficulty, every man was a stumbling-block, and in many cases the doctrine was wasted like rain upon the barren sand. At one place even his miracles were powerless; at that place he could do but few mighty works—their unbelief was greater, so to speak, than his faith, and he did not there many mighty works because of their unbelief.

Have we any consciousness or experience on our own part which answers to this in any degree, and helps us to understand it? You preachers have, for you know that there are some towns in which you cannot preach. Personally I know that right well. There are some towns in which I find it utterly impossible to say what I have prepared to say. I may, indeed, utter the words, but they come back upon me, and bring no blessing or answer of human heart along with them. They have struck a wall and

rebounded and come home, and I cannot get rid of them as gospels and as benedictions. You singers know it. There are some rooms in which you cannot sing : you are choked, suffocated—nothing in the construction of the room answers to your voice ; you have no co-operation in the walls, in the ceiling, in the floor—everything is dead against you, and you who can in other places, under kindlier circumstances, sing to the delight of your friends, and even to the satisfaction of critics, are not at all yourselves under circumstances which seem to depress and disable you. We all know it. There are some men to whom we cannot talk. Conversation is still-born when they are present. I want to say something, but I cannot ; I have propositions to make, but I cannot make propositions to dead walls or to gravestones. I have sorrows to tell, I have griefs for which I want some human sympathy, but I cannot unburden myself to the men who are round about me on this occasion or on that. We all know the meaning of this temporary disability and disennoblement, so that we who have power under other circumstances are unable to do any mighty works there because of some want, some antipathy, some occult and unnameable cause that shuts us up and makes us barren alike of intellectual conception and verbal expression and force.

Well, it was much the same with Jesus Christ upon another plane, that is to say, upon a much higher level. He was not the same Christ always. The conditions being prepared and equal, how his speech rolled like a river—the people welcoming him, eager to hear him, giving him heart-room. Why, he seemed to talk himself up into heaven, and thence to distribute the very bread of life and water from the river of God. Such is the power of sympathy ; so true is it that faith works miracles, that good hearing creates good speaking, that social sympathy elicits the whole fullness of the heart, all its secret and mystery and blessedness of love.

How was it that Jesus Christ failed in his ministry ? Some reasons are given in the sacred narrative. First of all, the people said, "We know this man. We do not know whence he gets his wisdom. Is not this the carpenter's son—is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James and Joses, Simon and Judas ; and his sisters, are they not all with us ? Whence then hath this man all these things ?" And they were offended in him. There was a kind of wild logic in their reasoning, a kind of maniac intelligence about their grim philosophy—they said : "The cause is not equal to the effect. We can measure this man. We know almost his birthday. We know his father and his mother and his business and his training, and all about him, and there is not in him, so far as we know his antecedents, anything to account for a wisdom that overlaps our rabbinical theology and our doctrinal philosophy. There is not in him enough to account for the wonders which he flings from his fingers and breathes from his lips."

Do not let us altogether despise these people, because we repeat their error to-day. My brethren, we repeat all the old errors; there is no originality in folly. Our fathers killed the prophets, and we build the sepulchres of the dead men and kill other living men, that our posterity may have grave-digging and tomb-building to attend to in their time. Do not believe all the nonsense you hear talked about heroic lives and splendid boys, who have triumphed over this and that and the other, and do not join the mob when they clap their untrained hands in clamorous and thoughtless applause about those boys now dead. Ask them how they treat the boys that are living in their own streets, and who are trying heroically and quietly to repeat the miracles which they have paid a shilling entrance-fee to clap in the great hall. Let us see what we do ourselves, and not be gloriously heroic over dead people.

Jesus Christ therefore shared the common fate. "There is his father, there is his mother, there are his kinsfolk—from whence hath this Man this wisdom? It is guessing, it is conjecture, it is audacity, it is blasphemy: it cannot be accounted for," and there is nothing people get so angry with as mystery of a supernatural kind. They feel as if they ought to know it; they are intelligent people, they are upon boards of direction, they are ministers of churches, they are office-bearers in high institutions, and they ought to be able to understand everything of the kind. Here is a case in which the spiritual power is in excess of the social antecedency and the social surroundings: therefore ignore it, deny it, contradict it, offend it, disable it, put it down. Rude reasoning, with just as much logic about it as you have seen occasional light in a lunatic's eye.

Well, there is another reason of failure—the utter bondage to the letter. The people to whom Christ spoke were literalists. I do not despise the letter, only I do consider that it is not all. The kingdom of heaven is as a grain of mustard seed, the least among seeds, but when it is sown and fully developed, it becomes a very great tree. So with the letter. It is necessary; we cannot do without it; but it is not to be held in the hand, but is to be planted as a seed, and is to bring forth all the poetry of bud and blossom and fruit, and is to afford lodgment for singing-birds, ay, room enough to give habitations to God's birds, not one of which he overlooks or neglects. When Jesus Christ said, "Beware of the leaven," "O," they said, "that is because we have not brought any bread with us;" and it distressed the Saviour to think that after all his teaching, they could give no higher interpretation to his figures—nay, they ceased to be figures before such unimaginative minds. When he said, "Except a man eat my flesh, he cannot live," they said, "How can a man give his flesh to eat?" and it distressed God's Christ to hear such literalistic criticism. You cannot interpret religious truth without the religious imagination—that wondrous power which keeps the literal and yet comes out into apocalyptic visions

and interpretations, and glorifies the letter until its raiments shine and its face glistens with a light brighter than the sun. When Jesus Christ said "bread," the people thought he meant bread. When he said, "I could give thee water to drink, which, having drunk, would cause thee never to thirst again," the woman said, "Then let me have it," not knowing that he spake of his heart's life and the Holy Ghost, the inner baptism, the satisfaction of the soul's thirst. Wherever this literalism is, in any congregation, the ministry will be a failure, unless, indeed, the ministry itself is a piece of literalism, and then it will be a double failure.

The third cause of the non-success of our Lord's preaching was the *spirituality* of the man and of the doctrine. This was the greatest difficulty of all. The Jews sought the more to kill him because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father. "The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.—The Son of Man, which is in heaven." There was a strange ghostliness about the doctrine of Christ. It had earthly aspects of extreme and indestructible beauty, but the people were afraid to acknowledge the fascination, lest, by their admissions, they should be hurried to conclusions that would make them Christians. Jesus had always something *beyond*. He never said, "This is the point at which I want you to stand still." His plan of educating his church is God's plan of educating the world. The promise come, the promise realised, a higher promise still is spoken. The prize seized, a grander prize is offered, and thus God "allures to brighter worlds and leads the way."

The people having seen this to be part of his method were very careful how they conceded anything or made any admissions without looking well around the circle of consequences. They learned caution by experience. At first they were clamorous in their applause, but by-and-by they came to understand that applause was not enough. Then they came to hostility. They found it was one of two things then, and it is one of two things now—either worship or hatred. There are men about whom you have no strong opinion; they are what are called nice, pleasant men, very agreeable persons, individuals whom you might pass by the thousand in the street, and take no notice of—altogether without specialty or accent. But when Christ comes, it is one of two things; it is, worship him, love him, give him all; or it is, crucify him, crucify him. So the people were going to give applause. "Well done," said they; "repeat that miracle, show us another sign, renew the testimony of tokens;" and Jesus said, "You have had enough of this; I have wrought miracles enough to save the world if miracles ever would save it; now you must think, love, trust, repent, believe." At that point the great division was set up. The people said, in effect, "His parables are intellectual gems, his voice is full of varied and thrilling music, his language is nothing short of a Divine election of

words, his retorts are keen and final, his miracles are mighty and beneficent, he is indeed the supreme wonder of our land." Jesus Christ said, "That will not do ; so far, so good, if good ; so far, so bad, if the rest be not added." There was partial faith, no doubt. Many of the Jews believed on him, and said, "When Christ cometh will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" That reasoning would seem to point to this man as the Messiah. Many of the people, when they heard these sayings, said, "Of a truth this is that prophet." All the people were amazed, and said, "Is not this the Son of David?"

So there was an acknowledgment of peculiar influence and special powers. Was Christ satisfied? A very beautiful trait of his character comes out here. An impostor would have been intoxicated with the applause ; Christ declined it. The people said, "Never man spake like this man." The people would have taken him by force to make him a king, the people delighted in his miracles, and made him famous concerning them. Was this enough? Alas! it brought the expression of an infinite distress into Christ's face. There is some applause that damns a man, there is a liking for a ministry which crushes the minister. What did Christ want? To see of the travail of his soul! To applaud his miracles was to annoy him, to speak about what he had done was to give him offence. He said, "Do not speak about it ; miracles spoken about lose their meaning. Tell no man ; go home to thy friends and think." He was afraid that the people's applause would end in itself, in mere admiration, and in merely spreading for him a high-sounding name as a kind of consecrated juggler. He knew human nature, and he said, "Be quiet about the miracles ; go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." When the miracle was wrought, he said, "Go home and say nothing about it." We cannot be trusted with too many miracles, they unsettle our intelligence, they were not meant as other than alphabetic and indicative. If we make more of them we invert and spoil the purpose of Christ. Christ spoke of his soul—the travail of his soul, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Please his soul, and you give him sincere and pure delight.

But surely Jesus Christ kept in hand all whom he did succeed in getting to hear him and like him? No. Many escaped from his grasp. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." He was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. That is a marvellous circumstance in our Lord's life. He had difficulty in getting any : he did not keep all whom he did get. He was despised and rejected of men. Can we wonder that we hear in our own day of ministers who have to complain of similar non-success? Do you know how ministers of Christ are now spoken of in this matter of failure and success? I will tell you, but do not repeat what I tell you. The

common inquiry is, "How is he getting on?" and the frequent reply is, "They are not filling—they are not filling. He does not fill the place. He does not keep up his congregation. The place was not so full as I have seen it. I think there is a falling away." Why I have even heard some lunatics say that the *collection* was not quite so large as it used to be! Ah, me! my Christ, my God's Christ, it is the old criticism over again, and it will be the old crucifixion. God grant that it may be the old resurrection! We are wrong in our standards, false in our reckoning. *I* do not complain of the criticism. I thank God that for five-and-twenty years I have been standing in the midst of a crowd as a Christian minister, and therefore I make no personal references in the matter, but there are higher standards than numbers, money, patronage, gifts, or anything that is outside and secondary. Do not let us despise these; they are most useful and necessary, and if any man here has the gift of speech and can eulogise these things soberly and fully, I will accept his statement and will replace my own with his description. Only let us know that Jesus Christ had to suffer from exactly this same cause. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Did he then cease to walk? He hardened his face and went to the Jerusalem of his destiny. Keep steadily on thy purpose, and never mind who comes or who goes, be thy face towards God's will, and God will see that no stone can keep thee in the grave.

A falling-off of physical power there may be in your minister: alas! he cannot always be young. Time makes insidious advances upon us all. As there came a time in our boyhood when words suddenly revealed their full meaning to us, so there are special moments in our after life when a man says, "Why, I am no longer young." Who cares for the aged minister—who cares for the minister whose vigour is gone! Even a decline of intellectual force is possible: the man is not so ready and strong as he used to be. Once he answered the occasion as powder answers fire—now he is more torpid, he has farther to come, his sleep is of another kind, and steals more fatally over his brain. Who cares for him in that withering time? Always some—thank God.

But this physical decline, or intellectual falling away, is not the cause; the real reason may be deeper, and may actually be the supreme honour of the minister, as it was in the case of Christ. *When* did the disciples fall away and walk no more with Christ—when his power of working miracles was gone, when his power of inventing and delivering beautiful parables had declined? The cause lay deeper: do not let us hasten over it, but rather let us consider it deeply. From what time was it, then, when many of his disciples went back? It was when Jesus was most *spiritual* in his teaching. Hear the testimony. He began to say, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me

and I in him. As the loving Father hath sent me, and as I live by the Father, so he that eateth me even he shall live by me." It was THEN that the disciples said, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it?" Jesus hearing that objection went further, and said, plainly, "No man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father." From THAT TIME many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Why? Because the miracles were less glittering and notable? No. Because the parables fell off in intellectual beauty and force? No—but because the ministry became more *spiritual*. Just so now. When and why do the people love the minister? Which are the sermons which are little liked? I know. What are the sermons that will empty any church in London? O, my friends, belonging to this place or to that, for we gather here from many religious centres, how is it with you? Are you still hungering for little stories, striking anecdotes, pretty parables—are you still delighted with small rhetorical toys cut with a jack-knife and painted red and blue, or do you want the inner truth, Christ's flesh to eat, Christ's blood to drink, a baptism of the Holy Ghost, keen, piercing insight into the inner mysteries of God's invisible kingdom? From that time, from the moment he became intensely spiritual, his disciples walked no more with him.

I heard a great organist play. He played from Handel, and the people answered with feeble enthusiasm of hand and foot. He played from Mendelssohn and Beethoven, and there was the same acquiescence in fate—it was to be so, and was taken as such. He played a piece full of scenic representation, the village dance, the storm brewing, rolling, shattering the heavens—then the quiet, gentle hymn: it was most pictorial, most vivid and graphic, and the people answered as with a roar. The organist said to me afterwards, on being complimented on the reception of the piece in question, "Well, it was somewhat *ad captandum*." He was not pleased with the compliment. It was a beautiful piece, a rare and wonderful piece—but Handel and Beethoven, these were masters, so to speak, who opened the infinite. Alas! who cares?

Now this review of Christ's failure destroys two sophisms. First, that earnestness is always successful. O, the cant that is talked about earnestness! Was Christ earnest?

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of his prayer.

Was he earnest who, when he came to the city, wept over it, and said, "I would, but ye would not"? Was he earnest who sweat as it were great drops of blood, when no eye saw him but the waiting, wondering angels of God? Was he earnest who said at twelve years of age, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Was he earnest who said, "My

meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me"? Was he earnest who said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Was *he* earnest? And yet he was despised and rejected of men, and from that time forth many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.

And this review destroys the sophism that a right presentation of the gospel is always successful. People say, "Only preach the simple gospel and you are sure to succeed: only depict God's great love, only dwell upon the moral beauties of the government of the Most High, only speak earnestly, pathetically, and kindly, only exhibit the love of God, and you are sure to succeed." O vile fools, and wicked, in God's house to talk so, for it crucifies the Son of God afresh and puts him to an open shame. Such chaffering kills the true man. Did not *he* present the gospel in right aspects who called it bread and water and pardon and light and life and rest and peace and heaven? Yet he was despised and rejected of men?

VI.

CHRIST'S SUCCESS AS A PREACHER.

THE UNIVERSAL PREACHER—EXPOSITORY PREACHING—IN THE BEGINNING—THE TRUE MEANING OF SUCCESS.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, whilst our eyes are lifted up unto the hills whence cometh our help, may nothing rise between them and the sight they seek to prevent the glory and completeness of the vision. The enemy would deter us from prayer; many a worldly memory, many an unhappy anxiety, would torment our worship and break its peace. Do thou, therefore, lift up thy spirit as a standard against the foe, so that we may have full advantage of the opportunity which thou hast created for us in thy good providence. To-day we publicly meet one another at the cross of Christ—we who are so different the one from the other find in Jesus a common meeting-point. We are one in sin, in want, in pain. There is but one Healer—thanks be unto God, his name is Wonderful and his power is infinite.

We come to confess our sins—how can we begin the dreary tale, for it is without beginning in our recollection, as it is without end in our fear. We cannot tell when we did not sin; we were born in sin, we were shapen in iniquity, we are the children of wrath, there is no sunlight to guide us to a time when we did no sin. But thy love is older than our guilt. Jesus is the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Thy grace did anticipate our apostacy, and because of the infinitude of thy wisdom and thy purpose we had no sooner sinned than thou didst show us the delivering cross. Wash us all in the sacred blood, it penetrates the inner life, it finds its holy, redeeming way into the recesses of the spirit; where the guilt is deepest, there its triumphs are most astounding. Help us to believe in the sufficiency of Christ; remove all doubt and fear from our mind when it looks to the tree on which the Saviour died; beyond all that is little and limited in the letter, may we see the infinite gospel of the infinite love, and may our heart go out towards it in great bursts of sacred passion and grateful delight.

Our life is in thy keeping—we cannot keep it ourselves. When we think we have seized it, behold it has eluded our grasp. We suppose, in our ignorant wisdom, that we have taken the measure thereof and stated it in clear numbers, when behold it clothes itself with immortality and stands up immeasurable as thine own purpose. Help us to know that we are the temples of the Holy Ghost; forbid that we should call ourselves little or mean or unclean, for is not thy stamp upon us, and do not men read upon one another a superscription not written by human hands? Help us to realise our greatness in thy purpose, our littleness in our own deeds, our majesty in creation, our utter apostacy in our evil behaviour, and thus seeing how great we are and how small, may we go out of ourselves to find the answer to the painful mystery, nor rest until we find it in the holy, only Son of God.

Thy word is dear to us every day ; it speaks to us with a new accen every time we hear it ; it has for us a deeper answer to our deepening poverty ; it has a gospel for every pain and ache and sorrow and sore agony. Verily this is the word of God and none other. Other words all do fail, but this abideth for ever. May we be comforted by it this day as by a gospel old as eternity, yet new as the pain that kills us now. Thus may we delight in all the venerableness of truth, and in all its newness, according to the newness of our desire and our fear. We have been foolish before thee—the whole ten virgins have been fools ; we have wasted our life, we have neglected our opportunities, we have been the willing slaves and dupes of the eager devil, we have done evil with both hands earnestly, we have drunk poison out of golden goblets and earthen vessels—wheresoever we could find it we have drunk it with the thirst of fire. God be merciful unto us sinners ; now let this be the day of wisdom, the time of the coming of a new light into the soul, the hour of holy vow and sacred oath—may every man lay his trembling right hand upon the blood-altar and say, “ Hence on, I am Christ’s and he is mine.”

Nourish and comfort thy people as children who wait upon thy table and have no other feast to eat ; see that none goes without his daily bread. Dry the tear that no human hand can reach ; turn into hymn and psalm and glad anthem the groaning and the sighing which lie beyond all our curatives, and this day may there be joy in Zion such as never was known before.

Pardon our last transgression, our newest sin do thou cover up with all the waves of the sea. Regard us as old men and as little children, as men whose business is in the open world, as women who wait at the fireside and make up the bed of sickness and pain. Regard us as high and low, rich and poor, and by reason of the inflow of the infinite compassion of Christ into our souls, may we forget all these accidents of age and station and time, and enter into a communion that shall be rapturous, a fellowship that shall make us one.

Pity our littlenesses and infirmities : some we cannot help, some are our very selves, and without them men would not know us. Whilst thou dost pity what is little, pardon what is sinful with all the pardon of pardons which thou hast treasured up in the all-forgiving heart of Christ.

If any are here under special circumstances, let thy grace overflow the occasion and make it more memorable still. Bless the bridegroom and the bride, the stranger within our gates, the widow and the orphan, the sad and the lonely, the wrecked and the ruined, the prodigal who dare not pray, the wanderer who thinks he is too far off ever to return. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST achieved great *fame* as a preacher. The fame of him went abroad through the city where he was and all the region round about. Perhaps we have not sufficiently considered the value of *FAME*. It arrests attention, it begets interest first, perhaps confidence subsequently. Some men are famous preachers to children, others are famous with women, others with scholars, others with sectarians. That is *not* fame. Because it has no deepness of earth it will soon wither away. There are some who are great Church of England preachers, others who are great Dissenting preachers, but if either the one qualifying term or the other is needed, there is no greatness and there can be no immortality. He only can be immortal who speaks to the universal *heart*, that is, who speaks all languages, sympathises with all emotions, is acquainted with and can answer all the mysteries of the soul.

Such a preacher will of course have a *mixed* congregation. Such a congregation had Jesus Christ always round about him. Now we say of this man or of that, "He has a very *select* congregation." Poor soul! we say, and think it a compliment that he has a *picked* audience. Mean man! Jesus Christ had *all the world* to hear him, the old man and the little child and the wondering woman, the scholar, the peasant, the prodigal, the Pharisee, the publican—had *he* a very select assembly? The man who has a select assembly lives in a very poor twilight, and wields a very poor influence. Jesus Christ had a great *heart*, therefore all men came to him. The Man who preached about rest was sure to have a large company of hearers. For we are all weary, weary all over, and if any man or woman shall rise to offer rest, the offer has music enough in it to make a gospel. We are not all glad, but we are all sorrowful. Gladness is a transient light, a partial glory; but sorrow's gloom is a night big as our world, and it gloomily encloses every heart. Jesus Christ spoke to sorrow, to sin, to the deepest necessities of the heart. He always touched that deeper, hidden inner string that nobody else could get at, and because of his so doing all the world went out after him to hear his gracious words. A man who should come to you all the year round speaking of laughter and comedy and farce would be a man who would soon wear out your patience; he who spoke of the deeper things, of the need of pardon and the want of rest, and the offer of peace and the possibility of heaven, might be dull now and then, but the year round he would be God's angel to you. If your days are a thousand, you want such a man for more than nine hundred of them.

There was a marvellous *unity*, or combination, of qualities in the preaching of Christ. Combination is itself an excellence. The charm may be of the very fact of multitudinous and many-coloured union. I can show you red and amber and blue and purple, separately, here, there, and yonder, and in many places not to be numbered; but if you want to see them altogether, and what they can be and can do, at their best, you must wait till the sun turns the storm into a rainbow. In the union you will see a charm all its own. No separate colour can claim the whole charm; you need them all, and all blended as God blends colours on his palette, and then will you see that combination itself is a mystery and a perfection. So in the case of Jesus Christ. Miracles had been performed before Jesus Christ was born into the world. Parables, graphic and beautiful, had been spoken by Old Testament Prophets, sermons had been delivered to the people from time immemorial, from wooden pulpit and rocky platform and in temples of the wilderness, but in the unity of these things Jesus Christ stood alone, King of kings, Lord of lords, solitary, unapproachable, a very rainbow for combination and unity, gathering up into himself all colours, lights, beauties, and shaping them into a grace complete and infinite.

Jesus Christ despised fame as an *end*: he used it as a *means*. He did

not want to be merely talked about, he was afraid lest devotion should ooze away in flattering speech. That is the fear of the ministry to-day, it is the fear of the New Testament, it is the fear of every parable and every sermon in the New Covenant, that our worship should perish in eulogium. Jesus Christ would rather be contradicted and opposed than merely thanked and forgotten. This is wonderfully set forth in the book of the prophecies of Ezekiel: "Also, thou son of Man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of houses, and speak to one another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee, as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them, for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness, and lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass (lo! it will come) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them." This was the fear of Jesus Christ, lest the people should praise his voice, praise his tones, praise his way, praise his mouth, and never get at the story of *blood*, the gift of pardon, and never hear the cry of God in heaven over their perishing souls. How is it with us? Are we men who praise the vessel and forget to drink the living wine? Are we those who look in upon the banquetting room and say, "Well laid—well spread," and carry our hunger away? Let us bethink ourselves, lest a prophet has been in our midst and we have mistaken him for a common man!

Jesus Christ's success as a preacher was attained by his *profound exposition of the Scripture*. That is the only success worth having—a success that comes up out of the Scripture that abideth for ever will partake of the quality of the Scripture and will endure long. Jesus Christ's expositions of the Scripture were always new. How we mistake that matter of novelty! Our want is always new, our sin is always fresh, our hunger is always a novelty. You cannot become accustomed to hunger or to thirst. You may indeed be benumbed in a sense by their long continuance, but there is a loss going on all the time. If we brought to the church the originality of hunger, the preacher would supply the originality of answer. But if we drag our cold bodies and colder minds into God's house, if we constitute such a mass of commonplace that no human tongue can reach us or penetrate us, it is unreasonable to suppose that we shall be startled and dazzled by the originalities of a man who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. The demand will determine the supply. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. God shall always be new to him whose sin is vividly remembered and whose heart-want is actually felt.

The people who heard Jesus supposed that they knew the Bible. The everlasting delusion, the all-ruining sophism! No man knows the Bible! no man has read the Bible through, except in the letter. I have not read the first chapter of the book of Genesis, except in the poverty of its syllables—its music, its reckoning, its sweep, its conception, its poetry, its pathos, amaze me every time I read the wondrous words. The Bible holds its influence over men not because it is a thousand years old or ten thousand, but because it is *the present answer to our present need*. A book that is merely venerable will outgrow itself—there is a possibility, as we all know, of a man outliving his own reputation, or surviving himself—so will it be with any book that has nothing to plead in its own favour but its venerableness. The Bible is not only venerable in point of age, it answers to-day my sharpest pain, my hottest tears, my brightest joys. When I lose my child to-day, it says, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” When I dig my mother’s grave to-day it brings the largest lapful of freshest flowers to put around and upon the tomb, so deep, so dark. When all the blinds are down and the fine house is shrunken into a shadow, it is then I ask for God’s book, and then it is most clearly God’s.

Do you suppose you know the Bible? The Sadducees thought they did, and when they came to Jesus Christ he said, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” The Scribes thought they knew the Scriptures; indeed they were the very men who wrote the holy words and read them; they were, so to speak, the custodians or treasurers of the Divine literature, and if they did not know the Scriptures who did? You would think the people who live in a mountainous country would love the mountains best. You and I have gone through Alpine villages in which the people evidently looked upon the mountains with eyes unlighted, without wonder, without emotion. Why? Because of their familiarity with those gigantic and glorious hills. It was so with the Scribes; they were so familiar with the letter that they did not understand the spirit, as we may be so familiar with church ordinances as merely to observe the ceremony and never realise the Divine intent and music. Jesus Christ said, “Search the Scriptures.” Have we understood that word *search*? You have seen a man dig for silver? That is one help towards the meaning of the term “search.” You have seen a woman light a candle and sweep the floor and seek diligently till she found the piece she had lost? That is a hint towards the meaning of the word “search.” You have seen a man looking for one document which if he could find would make him a peer of the realm? Look at him, with spectacled eyes, with busy fingers, with bent form, with eager face—look how he listens to any suggestion, what letters he sends out to registrars, clerks, beadles, sextons, clergymen, any person or persons likely to help him. Have you seen such a process?

That will give you some idea of what Jesus meant when he said "Search." He did not mean that we were to look round with cold, indifferent eyes, and take up anything that might happen to occur in our process of blind looking. He meant the industry of the soul, the very agony of the spirit, a searching, seeking, digging, groping, striving, that meant the very agony of the combined faculties which make us men.

Jesus did not come with a *new* Bible. He read the old one, and when he read it men's hearts burned within them. We cannot read it so, in the same degree; yet in our own degree we can read it after that very self-same sort. You hear one man pronounce a word, and you think nothing about it; another man says the same word and it sounds like a call to battle, or like the dropping of a mother's benediction. When Jesus read the Scriptures men contested amongst themselves whether he was reading out of the very scroll or not. We need no new Bible—we need the right heart to read the old one, and then it will make the heart that so reads it glow with sacred emotion, it will lift up that heart to heights of rapture and triumph, in the feeling of which time will be but a passing shadow, and earth a speck neither to be mentioned nor named.

Look at that first chapter of the book of Genesis, at the very first verse. It will always remain to be explained. In the beginning——" That would prove the Scripture to be inspired, to me. I want nothing more. The subtlety of the suggestion, the infinity of the wisdom, not to fix a date where no date could be fixed, where the astounding figures would absorb our arithmetic and want another a million times larger, and would mock it in proportion to its swollen magnitude. If there arise men who say that the world has been existing sixty thousand years, the "BEGINNING" swallows up the sixty thousand as the Atlantic swallows up a stone. When the great man has turned all the rocks into slate and all the forests into pencil, and filled his huge slate with ciphers, with the largest unit at their head, "In the BEGINNING" swallows up him and his slate, and lo! it stands the only truth. Parable is larger than dogma. "In the beginning" is the dateless date, the immeasurable and unnameable period.

For any man to have written that word of his own accord seems to me to be impossible. Look at all other men—take ourselves as an example—we want to find the *date*: this man did not. How did he come to be different from us? We turn wrinkled and grey, and our backs stoop because of our sedentary devotion to the slate, because we want to find out the *exact date*. That is human: intensely, awfully, comically human! He would be a man bigger than all others who could come into an assembly and say, "Gentlemen, this world was made on January the 13th, seventeen thousand eight hundred and fifty seven years and five months ago." Aye, what a great man he would be!

"In the beginning, GOD"—the name out of which all other names

come, the life-name, the name which encloses within itself Father, Mother, Child, Helper, Saviour, Lord, King : for are not all these but sparkles of an infinite glory, and not final terms which begin and end in themselves? GOD—so multitudinous yet so lonely, so awful yet so familiar, so necessary yet so appalling, who has yet defined God and set a ring of empty words around him which shall stand as the equivalent of his infinity? That God is a whole number—who has found out all the fractions that completely represent him? That is the unceasing mystery and the unceasing torment of the human mind.

“In the beginning, God CREATED.” We are familiar with that word *created* now ; but think yourselves back and tell me what it means. It was a new word in human speech. We know what artifice is, and manufacture, and handiwork—but what is *created*? It has no equivalent in all our literature. It is a word at once familiar as light and inaccessible as a star. Beware lest your familiarity deprive you of originality. Beware lest, having said “created,” you think that utterance is definition. “*Beginning*” stands undefined ; “*God*” undefined ; “*created*” undefined. To live within little literary definitions is to live on sand, when we might be revelling in the Paradise of God.

Another element in the success of Jesus Christ as a preacher was the *continual and healthy excitement* which his preaching occasioned. Nobody could listen to Jesus Christ with indifference. I have heard of men listening in London city, and that not a great way from here, as if they were not listening. I have heard of men talking while great preachers were delivering their discourses under swelling domes. I have been present when people were gathered around a preacher, and who were paying not the slightest attention to him, and my wonder was why they should have come at all, chaffering and chattering as they were in their seats. Jesus Christ's preaching excited everybody. It *maddened* some people—and unless our preaching does that it is of no use. If a man goes to church and sleeps, I do not care who the preacher is, he is not equal to the miracle of doing that man any good, and if a sermon be so simple and nice and beautiful and so charming as to roll over the hearer as water rolls over an oiled surface, it will do the hearer no good. I like to be turned into a frenzy by a preacher. I like to contradict him, to ask him questions, to say “Stop,” at the time he torments me and makes me writhe under him ; but *afterwards* I feel as if I had been at school, or on a battlefield, or on a mountain, drinking the wine of the fresh wind, and receiving baptisms and benedictions.

The failure of Jesus Christ, upon which I spoke last, was local and temporary—his success is universal and everlasting. Jesus Christ is preaching to-day. All the congregations gathered this morning all over the globe are gathered around Jesus : all the hymns that are sung to-day by congregated

millions are sung in honour of Jesus ; every trembling prodigal that comes home to-day saying, " I am no more worthy to be called thy son," is brought in by Jesus ; every emotion that swells our hearts to-day, every hope that breaks upon the lowering cloud and cleanses the sky of such gloom, is a miracle of Jesus. He still turns the water into wine, he still gives us our dead back in great resurrections, he still turns the corruption of our life into the incorruption of our immortality. Without Christ there would be no preaching to-day.

Let us beware how we use that word " success " in connection with spiritual things. It is not an arithmetical term. A man is not failing because his pews are empty—a ministry is not necessarily a failure because there may not be numerical additions to the visible church. A man is not necessarily succeeding because his pews are crowded and because thousands enroll themselves on the register of the visible fellowship. We have nothing to do with either failure or success ; we are called to sow the seed, to do the work, to suffer and endure and wait and hope, and God giveth the increase. Poor father and mother, you think you have had no reward in your family? Cheer up, you will have good harvest yet. You nave planted and sown and watered? Yes. God giveth the increase, thou canst not tell how or when or which way—leave it, dear honoured parent, and it will be well with the child.

Ministers of Christ, you say you have cried your very eyes out, and worked until your heart has been sore, and ached with great agonies, and no good seems to have come of your labour. Wait. In the morning sow thy seed, in the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not which shall prosper, or whether both shall be alike good. Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days thou shall find it. God is not mocked : whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. Labour more abundantly and more hopefully, and leave the Harvest to God, as he has left the seed time to you.

You say, " There has not been much success in the church, we only added one last year." I am not speaking now about any particular church, but about a church in which such circumstances may easily have occurred. " We only added one last year." Who was that one? " Well, it was a poor washerwoman." O indeed. Any family? " Large family ; six boys that we know of." And you added the mother of six boys to your church? Who can tell how many you added when you added that poor laundress? These may be six kings, six leaders of men, six apostles. And you say you only added one last year. What was his name? " His name? I think his name was Robert Moffat." And you only added Robert Moffat to the church in one year? Do you know who Robert Moffat is! When you added Robert Moffat to the church you added a **WORLD!**

THE HEARING EAR.

PREPARATION FOR HEARING—THE MANNER OF PREACHING—DOERS NOT
HEARERS ONLY.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou touch our ear and it shall hear wisely and justly, and shall lose nothing of all the music of thy voice. Our ear is already filled with vulgar noise, so that we cannot hear the goings of the Almighty, and much of the tenderness of thy tone do we lose, because of the uproar which engages our attention. O that our ear might be touched, even circumcised, and blest, and prepared to hear every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Call us now to attention; may every man here listen for his soul's good; if any have come to listen for aught else may the change take place in the view this moment, and may the supreme inquiry of every heart be, "What saith the Lord?" and may every soul go out to him saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Yea, let a spirit of hearing fall upon the whole congregation, an earnest desire to listen, so that nothing may be lost of all the message which thou dost this night give unto us. We bless thee for thy gospel, so full of tenderness, glowing with light and love, the very utterance of thine heart, the one way to the living God and his everlasting heaven. Help us to listen to it gratefully, with ecstasy of delight and passion of thankfulness, without indifference of heart, but with all ardour and intensity of love.

Regard every one of us as each most particularly needs. If any man here is praying his first true prayer, let this be the time of a great answer to his soul. If any man here is vowing to lead a better life, Lord, turn over the page for him on which he means to write his better writing; establish him in the goodness of his oath; may nothing occur to imperil the constancy of his holy resolution, but may he watch unto prayer, and succeed in the great work. If any man is in peculiar circumstances of perplexity and strangeness, blind so that he cannot see, weak so that he cannot stand, dazed and confounded by the infinite rush of life, the Lord himself send his angel or his prophet to give sight, and strength, and comfort, and guidance to such. If any of us are fat of heart, having waxed prosperous and forgotten our early love, the Lord judge us not with his lightning and thunder, but speak to us with rebukes that shall awaken, and not with judgments that shall destroy. If any man is planning the wrong trick and about to play the foul game, and to do the thing which is hateful in the sight of God, the Lord turn his counsel upside down, and cause all the lines of his life to tremble in confusion. And if any man is endeavouring now to serve the Lord with his whole might, to live a complete and unbroken life in Christ, send more than twelve legions of angels to help him to carry out his purpose.

We want the spirit of hearing now, we want the prepared ear, we want our hearts to be at peace, and our whole attention to be on the alert. Blessed Christ, come to us, speak thine own word to our quickened ear. We bless thee for thy life, thy teaching, thy atoning sacrificial blood, thy whole priesthood, thy mighty, prevalent

mediation. O, if thou dost open thy wounds again, may it be to give us room in thine heart. Amen.

TEXT : "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."—MARK vii. 16.

THIS is a common expression in the Scriptures. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The text says, "If any man have ears." All men have ears, but that is not the meaning of this particular text. He must not only have ears, he must have ears to hear, ears that *can* hear, and that *do* hear. It is not enough to have the sense of hearing, it must be put into exercise, and it must be kept at the highest point of attention. Many persons have ears who never hear anything worth hearing. You cannot hear unless you *listen*. If you were in earnest you would listen—*are* you? Do not leave all the work upon the preacher : meet him half-way, give him your attention, and he cannot fail; his message is such as to protect him from failure, but he cannot do many mighty works among you if you shut the door of your ear. Take a thousand men listening to a sermon; probably not one in ten hears the sermon as the preacher meant it to be heard. Every man hears a voice, a sound, a noise—he hears one sentence following another; but that inner music which seeks the soul in its loneliness, to heal it with the love and hope of God, who hears in its ineffable meaning and its sweet benediction! Nor is this much to be wondered at. Consider how the ear has been treated all the week. Do not condemn the ear unheard. Let it plead its own cause, and it will mitigate the harshness of our judgment. "All the week long," says the ear, "I have heard nothing throughout the day but the clang of money, the tumult of bargaining, the uproar of commerce, the clamour of selfish controversy; and at night I have heard nothing but gossip, and twaddle, and childish remarks on childish topics—I cannot easily liberate myself from these degradations, and listen to words most ghostly and to gospels that seem to come from other worlds. Have patience with me, for I need awakening first out of an entangled and troubled dream." Verily there is sense in that fair speech; then it should have due weight. But the sense of the speech imposes a corresponding responsibility upon the speaker. We should *prepare* ourselves to hear the Divine voice. The reader of an immortal play asks, and asks in reason, that the audience should be seated ten minutes before the reading begins. It is a sensible stipulation. Shall I be unjust if I ask that my friends should be *an hour with God* before coming to hear the public proclamation of his word? Is it decent that we should wait on Shakspeare and leave the Eternal to wait on us? The ear should have a little prayer all its own. I will teach it one : "Lord, still the waves that are heaving and foaming in me, or I shall miss all that is tenderest in the music of thy voice. Quiet the mean noises which fill me with a worldly din, and let me hear the words, every one of

them, which will bless the life. Circumcise me : yea, put thy sharp knife upon me, thou God of the circumcision, and make me hear. Then speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." There would be no poor sermons if we came thus ; we should be all ATTENTION. As a matter of fact, how does the case stand ? What was the last word you spoke at the door ? Some mean word about the cold wind, some poor little narrow word of criticism upon a neighbour's reputation, some childish remark upon a puerile topic, chaffer and chatter, and hollowness, and nothing, and then rushing in you sing, " Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts." It cannot be done ; such miracles are beyond your power. Can you be dragging your wings in the mud this moment, and in the flash of an eye spreading them out in the sun ? Then say not that the age of miracles is past ! I cannot do it. I must have time. I must think and pray, and then the banquet is always more than enough, abundant to redundancy, the lavish generosity of God !

That I am not speaking unjustly of the ear, I may refer to your own proverb, " Believe nothing you hear." Why ? Because you do *not* hear it. The first man did not hear it : he twisted it ; in passing through his corkscrew hearing, the straight line got a twist, and he never can straighten it out. So it has come down to him a marvellous story, a wondrous narrative of self-contradiction, utter and palpable absurdity. Then men say, " I *thought* he said so and so ; I *understood* him to mean thus and thus ; O, I beg pardon, I did not *catch* then what he said." And out of such foul springs do the streams of conversation rise, carrying their mud with them all through the acreage of our social economy. Thus we tell lies without lying ; we are carriers of falsehood, though we never mean to be untrue. How is this ? Because we do not *hear*. The ear is preoccupied ; invisible speakers are addressing it, lovers unseen are soliciting its attention, or it is asleep or on a journey, or under a spell. Hardly a man in this congregation can listen. It takes a *Judge* to listen. How the Judges do listen ! We are buying and selling all the time the man is preaching ; yea, we are doing a little business in the middle of his prayer ! To listen—who can do it ? God knew this, and therefore again and again he says, " He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." " If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." Who would attempt to deliver a message to a man asleep, or propose to speak to a man a mile off ? There are men in this house who are just now three thousand miles away !

Many a message has been lost because the speaker has not first roused the *attention* of his hearers. There is a man standing a little averted from you—his back is partly towards you—he is engaged in doing something, and you say, " Bring me three volumes of the ' Family Magazine,' John." He hears his own name at last, and says, " Sir ?" Poor rhetorician thou !

That was beginning at the wrong end. You should have said, "JOHN! Bring me three volumes of the 'Family Magazine' out of the library." "Yes, sir." See? Is that in the Bible? Every word of it—as to purpose and philosophy. How does God speak? First, *attention*. "Moses, Moses," and he said, "Here am I." "Samuel, Samuel." "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." "O earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." There is a science herein; study it, speaker and hearer.

The first thing to be done is to compel the ear to listen for the *right thing*. When I enter the house of God, it is to hear the word of God. If I went to hear a professional elocutionist I should go to judge of the balance of his voice; I should look out for the colouring of his tones; I should measure the velocity and the weight of his articulation; I should make an elocutionary study of the man. But in going to hear God's preacher, I go to hear *God's word*, how I may be saved, redeemed, purified, and fitted for Divine uses in this world. I want to hear how I may get home again after many weary wanderings in stony places; I want to hear what Christ said about sin, and pain, and woe, and want, and pardon; I want to hear about those who have gone up, who cares for them, what do they, how near are they; I want to hear about the secret place where the light is pure and the rest is without shock, or pain, or dream. My soul being alive with expectation and aflame with hope, God will not disappoint it, or he will expunge from his own book the sweet promise "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

It is said that the *manner* of the speaker has a good deal to do with the attention of the hearer. That is true, but an earnest hearer will care very little about the manner if he is deeply interested in the matter itself. Just look at that company of men, and listen to that person with a long paper standing at the head of the table. He seems to have chronic bronchitis. How he chammers his words, how hoarsely he utters his sentences, how poor his enunciation! he calls a bush a *bash*, and a foot a *fut*. Listen to him and see how the people are all on the *qui vive*. What is the matter? He is reading a WILL, and every man in the company expects to *get something*. How choice they are about the elocution! They say to one another, "Rather a bad manner, don't you think? His manner is much against him, don't you think?" No, no. "What is there for me? and how much for me?" and they would go twenty times a day to hear that wheezy, asthmatic, non-elocutionist read a WILL, if they had any hope of getting anything out of it. Now I have a will; hear it:—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." That is *your* portion. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That is *yours*. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Claim your inheritance and enjoy it! "Blessed are the

merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Take it all. Have you heard the will? Claim your property!

You say that manner has a good deal to do with speaking. So it has. Let me remind you that manner has a good deal to do with *hearing*. Our Saviour is reported in the Gospel of Luke to have said, "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear." There is an art of hearing; attention is not without a science of its own. Hear for eternity, hear for your soul's good. Do you *want* to hear the gospel now? Then you shall. "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." You hear *that*? "The blood of Jesus, Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come." Hear ye these words, or do they fall upon the cold ears of a dead soul? If you have heard these words you never can say again, long as you live, that you never heard the gospel!

Yes, there is a manner of hearing. Some persons listen *captiously*—they go for the purpose, express, of finding fault and showing their own cleverness in pointing out the fault which they suppose they have found. "These are spots in your feasts of charity." Some listen *critically*. They will make a man an offender for a word. They will dwell upon non-essential points: they prefer the pleasure-ground of art to the entangled forests of nature, out of which you cut the navies of the world. "These are clouds without water." Some listen *indifferently*: they care not what is said, or who says it: the preacher sheds his blood in vain for them—they see not nor heed the living sacrifice; they know not what the passion costs. "These are trees twice dead," and will be "plucked up by the roots."

When I was at Niagara I could not get a drink of water out of the cascade, not because there was so *little* water, but because there was so *much*. It is the worst place in the world to go for a glass of water, is the torrent of Niagara; it will drown both you and your glass! If there had been *less*, I could have got *more*. It is even so with some discourses. You do not get the benefit of them at the time, but down the river of the week, as far as about Wednesday, you can stoop and drink the quiet stream; the water that was shattered into foam by its infinite plunge is now healed and calmed like a redeemed life, and a mile down you may see your face reflected in the water that was snow a day since, silver foam making rainbows round the rocks—now it falls and quiets itself into a stream which makes glad the city of your life. The torrents of Chalmers are even now settling into quiet streams which many people are drinking with thankful gladness. Even as far down the Time-river as this, the

torrents of puritan eloquence and theology are only just flowing at pace enough to be caught and used for the soul's drinking. Wondrous is this. Jesus Christ's speeches dazed the people at the time ; they said, "He is mad ;" and now these speeches, having taken their plunge like the Niagara cascade, are streams that make glad the city of God.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." "Take heed how ye hear."

"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man." Have you heard these things ? If you say, "Yes, every word," then "Be ye DOERS of the word, and not hearers only."

A GOSPEL PARABLE.

PICTURE to yourselves a man of lofty stature and beaming countenance, one of the noblest specimens of the human race—strong, dignified, majestic. Think of his sitting at the door of his dwelling as the summer sun is glowing in the far west, having around him a group of loving children who delight to call him father, and vie with each other in many playful attempts to rouse him from an unusual fit of silence. They have never feared him; his approach has always added to their joy; they have ever hung upon him with undoubting trust and love. They had good reason to do so. Probably he had no superior in the country of which he was the pride. When strangers passed him they turned to admire his towering stature and kingly carriage. Nor was there one sign of repelling haughtiness upon his noble face; at the sight of a little child it would expand into a luminous smile, and a tender concern would sadden it when in presence of tottering old age or incurable pain. It was no act of constrained courtesy or pretentious condescension on his part to pick a wayside flower for an unknown child, or to guard infirm travellers from the dangers of the busy thoroughfare. What he did, he did with charming naturalness; what he said, he said with manly simplicity. No honest man ever had occasion to fear him; no unjust person could feel quite easy in his presence. A kind of spiritual sunlight seemed to accompany him, which not only caused his own character to stand out with perfect distinctness, but gave unexpected revelations of the character of others. His domestic life was a scene of happiness: adored by the wife of his youth, loved with all the love of his children's hearts, he was at rest in his house, as a man without a suspicion or a fear, so strong yet so tender; so mighty to defend, so gentle to console; courtly enough for the society of princes, simple enough for the plainest of his neighbours; his very presence was an inspiration; weak people felt that *his* strength was their own, young men set him before them as their ideal of manhood. One look would convince the observer that to physical advantages of the highest rank he added intellectual powers of no mean order; the form of his head, the steadiness and lustre of his piercing eye, the lines upon his face, showed that he was no stranger to careful and exciting thought. He had, indeed, long been accustomed to the kind of thinking that always brings suffering in its train; not cold speculation, but study that troubles the heart with many a bold assault upon its most

valued trusts. There is a style of so-called thinking which is merely a mental amusement, there is also a thinking which strains the heart to the point of agony. The rugged lines cut into that solemn yet glowing face showed how much the *heart* had been engaged in this man's thinking. In many a lonely wandering in the deep ravine and over the rocks which lay within easy distance of the splendid metropolis in which he resided, he had watched as if for an angel which should tell him divine secrets, and had prayed to be saved from the delirium which comes of intellectual trespass upon the sacred provinces of God. Death had visited his house and twice turned the cradle into a coffin, and he had not forgiven death for that great sorrow. The problem of Providence—the government which turns into a tormenting enigma the course of everyday affairs—he vainly attempted to solve, for he did but find in every answer another and deeper question. These experiences left their mark upon him; they ennobled, yet saddened, the expression of his countenance, and threw into his voice a chastened and pathetic tone. On the evening referred to, he had been sitting at his door for most of an hour in a silence which the mirth of his little children could not thoroughly break; whilst looking at his little ones he seemed to be looking far beyond them; in answering their questions he seemed to be listening to unseen interrogators; and when his hand was put out to them it seemed as if an invisible power was pulling it in another direction. Only the sunset before he had sat in the same place, calm, and even joyful—to-night he is as one hovering on the brink of a troubled world, through whose shadows he can see nothing of light.

I.

HAVING this morning sanctified his house by praise and prayer addressed to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, he proceeded to engage in his customary work. Tender was his adieu to his household—not, perhaps, in reality tenderer than usual, certainly not intentionally so, yet, in the gloomy days which soon came upon her, his wife recalled with mournful satisfaction the pathos of his farewell. She knew that he had spent many hours in painful and fruitless endeavour to understand the ways of God amongst the children of men; and now and then, with all the skill of that blessed love which speaks from a distance, that softens its tone to the ear of pain, she had sought to remind him of the manifold practical blessings with which human life had been enriched, and which should protect the mind from the insidious temptation which comes from the side of mystery. His recognition of these blessings was most grateful and emphatic; yet he turned from the light with anxious desire to dispel every shadow which lingered on the way of God. This morning his prayer was hardly free from implied reflection upon the government of the

world, especially upon the permission of death to destroy the life of children. Still there was nothing in his tone to indicate an unusual state of mind, or to excite uneasiness or apprehension. The mystery of the world had been to him so long a burden that those who knew him best had ceased to wonder at the melancholy which shadowed his worship. On his way to the confines of the city where awaited him the engagements of this particular day, a mighty wind suddenly arose ; now it wailed as if in pain, and then it roared as if in defiance or triumph ; for a moment it became subdued, and instantly it rushed in shattering shocks, and tore the trees which clothed the deep ravine as if the very spirit of vengeance had been let loose upon them. No other traveller was in sight, yet a Voice distinctly addressed the lonely man.

"Bitter, infinitely bitter," said the Voice, in a whisper which chilled him. He paused : he looked, but there was no sign of a presence ; he turned his eyes to the cloud which had just thrown a shadow over him, but no figure gave it shape or meaning—

"Yes," continued the unearthly Voice, drawing, if possible, still nearer the astounded man ; "accursed be his power—may his throne fall, and his sceptre rot—amen, amen," it groaned in a stifled manner.

The man, though brave and fearless in all the ordinary relations of life, was stricken with horror. Hot drops started from his brow, to be followed quickly by a chill which made him shiver. With parched and reluctant lips, he could only say—

"Who—what ?"

And as he spake it seemed as if heavy wings were softly flapping in the now quieter wind.

"Sitting there," continued the ghostly voice, in the same sad tone—"sitting there with his feet upon the humbled world, seeing men perish and devils suffer, yet never spending a thought of mercy upon them ; pleasing his vanity by making suns and blowing them out ; keeping up a treacherous peace in his stately halls by driving away the noble angels that ask a question or suggest a doubt. Oh ! Oh ! would I could strike off the pillars of his proud throne, and bring him for one hour into the lake of fire."

The Voice seemed to be nearer still, speaking not only in the ear, but in the very soul. "Poor men—poor men—praying to a God who never hears them."

The lonely listener was bound to the spot, though anxious to move ; he was under a spell which he had no power to break—the Voice was mightier than an arm.

"Man," said the Voice, with fuller emphasis, "speak freely to me and thou shalt be safe ; I will comfort thee at least with such poor comfort as we can have so long as *he* drops the poison of his sovereignty into the

fountains of the universe—I will watch thee, I will comfort thee, I will show thee where alone thou canst have a moment's rest—I will lead thee to a spot on which *he* seldom deigns to look, and which is therefore blest ; tell me, O man, though thou art strong in body, hast thou not had sorrows which darken and weaken the soul ? ”

The listener was dumb : self-control was utterly lost.

“ Yes,” continued the Voice, “ thy silence is right ; we know thee well ; thou hast had sorrow upon sorrow even to the breaking of thy heart ; thou hast no fool's brain, yet often has it been on the point of madness when thinking upon *his* crooked and unequal ways.”

Suddenly there was a sound in the air as of much subdued yet mocking laughter, and in unconsciously turning as if to see whence the sound proceeded, the eye of the traveller descried the dim outline of a procession moving towards the tombs.

“ Again—again—and every hour,” the Voice continued ; “ see yonder, O man ; knowest thou those who mourn ? knowest thou what they carry ? It is their only child—their idol—and *he* allowed the little life to perish whilst he was occupied in receiving the applauding hallelujahs of a servile host that would slay him if they could. We saw the child die ; we counted the bitter tears of those who loved him ; we pitied but could not help the sufferers, and there they now go to lay on the banqueting table of death the very treasure of their hearts.” And as the Voice so said, the fiendish laughter was repeated.

“ Thou rememberest, O man, when thine own little girl died ? ”

The listener fell to the ground as if smitten by an irresistible arm.

“ Thou dost ; thy love hath an imperishable memory. That same night I was near thee ; I saw thee again and again fall upon thy knees in a secret chamber, and I heard thy sobbing prayer to him thou callest God ; it was a useless prayer ; he was making suns, and banishing angels, and raining fire into the bottomless pit, and doing other mighty things that better become a God than drying human tears. He could have spared thy little girl ; she might have been with thee to-day.” Again the air was shaken by a mocking sound, and the poor man clung to the dust as if in fear he should be borne away.

“ And thy brightest boy, too, I remember, when he died I was there : I saw thee smile at the child to comfort him, when thy manly heart was breaking with grief. I saw thee retire to wring thy helpless hands in mortal agony, and then come back to smile at the child. I knew how much that smile cost thee—I saw all the wonderful display of thine innocent hypocrisy, and I blessed thee for it ; *he*, too, saw it, but he came not to thy help ; he looked coldly down through the courses of the stars, and allowed thee to suffer on through all the dreary hours ; he was playing with the lightnings, he was marshalling the timid angels in eccentric order,

he was showing his craven idolators how grand a thing it is to be a God."

But this time there seemed to be a great number of invisible presences in the yet wailing though less tempestuous wind. The voice continued as if its complaint would never end—

"They who know nothing of him call him *Father*; I say it is a lie; he can see men lose their property, lose their children, lose their reason, and spend their days in drivelling idiocy or raging madness, and never cease his star-making, his angel-taming, and his comet-driving; could I pluck yonder key of hell from his shining girdle—" [here the legions shook in concert with helpless rage or rekindled ambition]—"O could I, could I escape that hateful eye that follows me everywhere—did he but sleep one hour in a hundred years—I would steal upon him in his slumber and he should be God no more,—I would sit upon his throne, and men should be blessed, little children should never die, no orphan should be found in all the earth, for tears there should be delight and peace—would that I were a God!"

"Shall we dwell with thee, O man?" said the Voice after a momentary pause; "we will guard thee; we will share thy griefs, and take nothing from thy little joy; we will help thy thinking, and guide thee to right conclusions."

* * * * *

Suddenly, in the very fulness of his strength, his countenance glowing with unnatural animation, the lonely man stood erect, and with frantic energy demanded—

"Who speaks to me of my girl in heaven, of my dear boy with God?"

But there was no change in the low, dull tone of the Voice. "Heaven," it said, "there is none for thy children, poor man, deluded by the hope that has mocked all ages; they die, and are as the glittering insects that perish; thou thinkest of them as winged angels rejoicing in the unclouded light; alas! thy thought is but a dream; thy children are in yonder tombs, they are not in heaven."

"Lie, lie, cruel lie," screamed the frantic man; "what I hear is a lie! My Rachel is in heaven: my Benjamin is in heaven: they are as angels in God's house!"

"Oh, man deluded," said the Voice, "I tell thee, tell thee sadly, thou livest in a mocking dream; we pity thee, yet we teach thee truth; thy little children, dear for ever to the memory of thy love, are as lights blown out: thou couldest not find them in all the chambers of his blazing creation. Hear us, O man, hear us, and be wise. We know him better than he can be known by the creatures of yesterday, who call themselves men. Ten thousand thousand years have we watched him from afar: he is a great God, making worlds that he may crush them, creating hearts that he

may break them, kindling fires that he may torture all whom he dislikes : we have watched his ways through unnumbered ages ; for unnumbered ages we have shivered at his footstool as unwilling suppliants ; for unnumbered ages we have felt the weight of his ponderous foot ; it is only for want of equal strength that we have so suffered ; our *Spirit* is yet untamed, we hate his presence, we resent his rule, and though he makes our hell intolerable, we delight to curse him to his face. Seest thou yonder pool which men call a sea ? It is but a drop, compared with the mighty waters with which we are acquainted. Oh to have seen what our pitying eyes have beheld on those stormy deeps—husbands and wives, parents and children, crying through the tempest that *he* might come and help them, and just as their thrilling prayer reached the point of agony, a thundering billow has dashed the vessel into ruin, and the Voice of Prayer was heard no more ; *this* is God—*this* is Father ! ”

The wind ceased, and as it subsided another voice said—

“ We will return to thee, and comfort thee at the time of the setting of the sun.”

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
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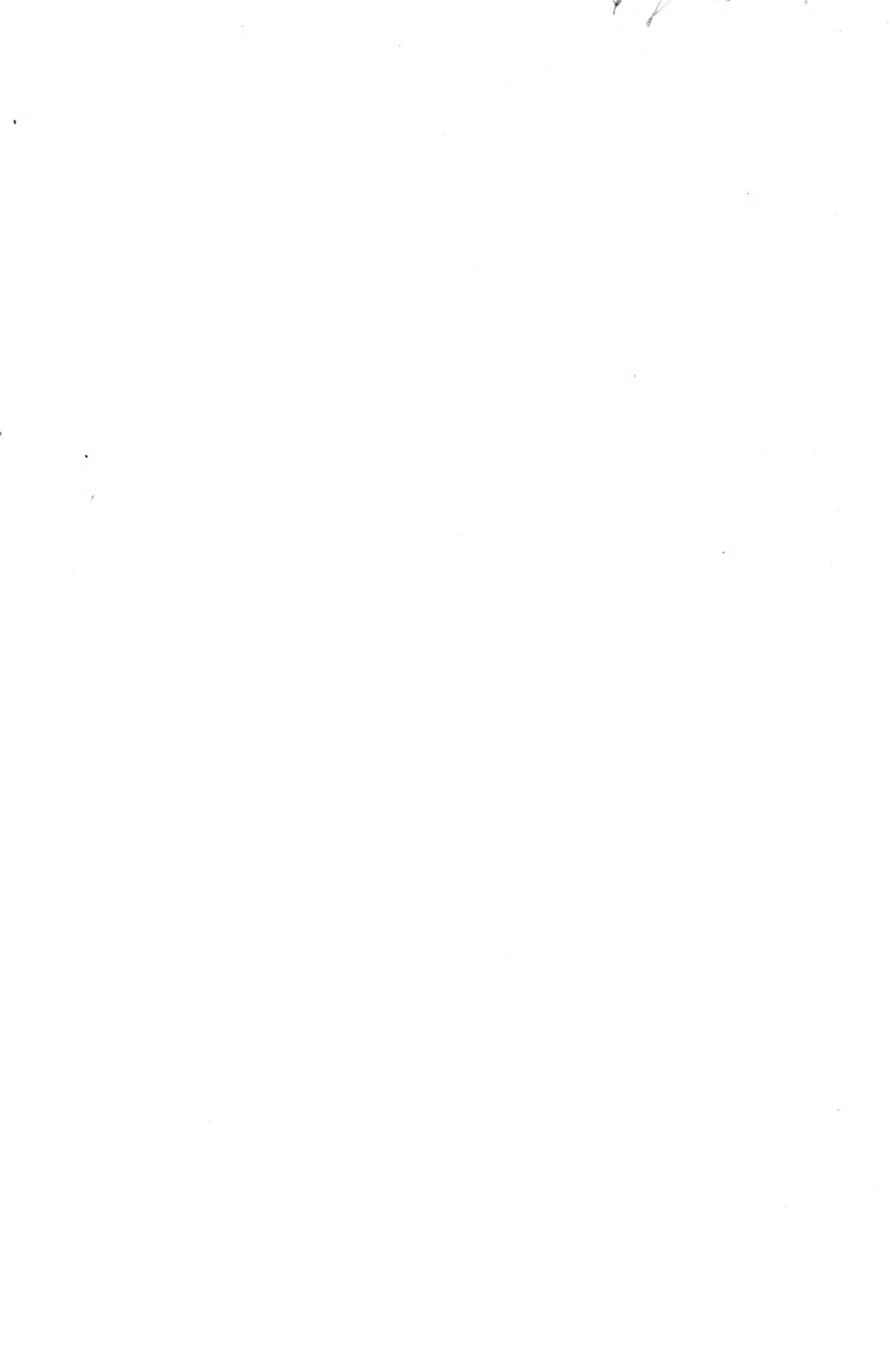
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